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BROTHER THEODORE'S CHAMBER OF HORRORS

A masterpiece of the macabre
Selected by
Brother Theodore and
Marvin Kaye

*“Maybe all I want,” says Brother Theodore,
“is to expose the innermost essence of our
swinish, rotten and rancified lives.”*

Since Brother Theodore is both an individual and a state of mind, this book reflects the essence of both—Theodorianism.

Absurdity, sardonic laughter, maniacal low-jinks—all are generously served up in a variety of tastes and flavors, along with urbane malice, deadpan insanity, slapstick mayhem, and even a trace of traditional Gothic blood.

The reader will seek in vain for such childish bugaboos as vampires or laughable imps whose sole claim to distinction is levitating beds and despoiling priests.

Brother Theodore allows no such convenient cop-out. His conception of horror is fixed in the infinite potential of Man himself for corruption and brutality.

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BROTHER THEODORE'S CHAMBER OF HORRORS

by
Brother Theodore and Marvin Kaye

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PINNACLE BOOKS • NEW YORK CITY

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BROTHER THEODORE'S CHAMBER OF HORRORS

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to the Keepers of the Flame

**BROTHER THEODORE'S
CHAMBER OF HORRORS**

INTRODUCTION

Who and What Is Brother Theodore?

This is a simple question.

But who can properly answer it?

Brother Theodore is alone in his class, and no label will fit him.

Many are called, but few are chosen. Brother Theodore is definitely chosen—although it is hard to determine for what.

Whatever Brother Theodore says, whatever Brother Theodore does—his masks are many and so tightly glued to his face that they *are* his face.

His appearance and demeanor are those of a frenzied Fuehrer . . . a maniacal messiah . . . a rabble-rouser without a cause—unless his cause is to promote the power of negative thinking and the glorification of anguish and despair.

His views are those of a man who searched for God and found the Devil. His laughter emerges from the innermost bowels of Hell.

Single-minded to the point of obsession, he delivers his brilliant, paradoxical, pessimistic non-messages to gasping, spellbound, mesmerized crowds—always remaining his disconcerting, preposterous, despicable, lovable, enchanting, outrageous, nightmarish self.

“Maybe all I want,” he says, “is to expose the inner-

most essence of our swinish, rotten, and rancified lives." If this is his goal, he succeeds frighteningly well, as anyone who has seen him performing on TV, in the theater, or at any of numerous colleges will testify. "And if people are disturbed by what they see," he adds, "the fault lies in the image and not in the mirror I hold up to them."

Clearly, Brother Theodore is not everyone's cup of (poisoned) tea, yet he has received lavish critical acclaim for his frantically funny and frightening evenings of macabre comedy. He has been compared to such diverse artistic talents as Charles Addams, Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre, Gahan Wilson—and Marcel Marceau and Nijinsky! His performances in New York at Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, Circle-in-the-Square, Evergreen Theater, and elsewhere have been characterized as "Frightening . . . Masterful . . . Preposterous . . ." (*Billboard*); "Whimsical, Macabre, Diabolical . . . A Genius of the Sinister" (*Daily News*); while Jerry Tallmer, of the *New York Post*, wrote; "Few indeed are the black humorists who have anywhere near as much magnetism and wit Theoretically, every artist . . . should be considered apart from himself and his life; but central to everything Theodore does is the fact that he once went into, and lived through, a concentration camp. He therefore knows that the world is insane, and being an intelligent and highly literate person, he also knows the only remaining posture for a human being is the posture of absurdity. Unlike Camus, who perhaps never had it so rough, his is also the posture of almost total bitterness, viciousness, fury . . . one of the most acrid satirists in his profession . . . all the vehemence of Carlyle and all the exactness of Swift. . . . It's the supremest possible condensation of all the vitriol that can boil through a frustrated heart and brain."

This, then, is Brother Theodore . . . a diabolical,

God-intoxicated apocalyptic messenger of null and void
... a sinister, saintly, pitch-black humorist ... a philosopher of Gothic dimensions ... a perfect guide through our individual hells.

His scalpel kills the worm that dieth not.

His madness cures the cancer of the soul.

Or vice versa.

Some Observations on Horror and Hokum

Since Brother Theodore is both an individual and a state of mind, an anthology bearing his name should reflect some of the more bizarre aspects of being *Theodorian*.

Absurdity, sardonic laughter, maniacal low-jinks—all are generously served up in a variety of tastes and flavors to suit both the least and the most exacting of literary palates. There is urbane malice in these pages, deadpan insanity, slapstick mayhem, and even a trace of traditional Gothic blood.

While there are fewer examples in these pages of sheer horror, those that there are ought to be more than sufficient for even the most jaded palate. For when Brother Theodore muses on the quality of terror, he eschews the comfortable demons that lurk in our subconscious. Here the reader will seek in vain for such childish bugaboos as vampires or laughable imps whose sole claim to distinction is levitating beds and despoiling priests ...

But there are far grimmer monsters lurking here: Death, Inhumanity, Poverty, Neglect, Loneliness—and the appalling nightmares of Age and the decay of reason. It is characteristic of our solipsistic society that the “greatest” horror stories of the past several years have been ones which thrust the burden of guilt on a scapegoat in the form of the Devil—a peculiarly naive con-

ception dating back to the Middle Ages, but extremely convenient for absolving culpable Man from the inevitable burden of guilt that is the sole spiritual mooring of the Twentieth Century.

Brother Theodore allows no such convenient cop-out. His conception of horror is fixed in the infinite potential of Man himself for corruption and brutality.

It is this brand of horror that leavens the mixture of gruesome humor in the ensuing pages.

Caveat emptor . . .

——MARVIN KAYE
NEW YORK CITY, 1975

In this dry-as-chalk-dust academic spoof, Eugene D. Goodwin gives us a first and last look at Professor Lubermayer, a stubborn old curmudgeon who is far more concerned with being correct than anything else. A reductio ad absurdum if there ever was one!

PROFESSOR LUBERMAYER'S FINAL LECTURE

BY EUGENE D. GOODWIN

*Vita nostra brevis est,
Breve finietur—*

"Good God," Belford sighed, fingering the weapon in his pocket, "it lacked only *that!*"

*Post jocundum, juvenu-u-tem,
Post molestam, senectu-u-tem,
Nos habebit hu-u-mus—*

Three sharp cracks snipped the melodic line like a filament of surgical floss: Lubermayer shutting the conference-room window on the improvised freshman concert in the college quadrangle; Lubermayer slamming two formidable black-leather doctoral dissertations on the mahogany tabletop.

"Since this is my last lecture," he snapped, "I will dispense with tedious expostulation. Consider my career, gentlemen: forty years of philosophy—except for poetry, the most tenuous, inutile indulgence on this most puerile planet!" He eyed the two doctoral candidates with unconcealed dislike: Rosner, in neat tweed jacket, sucking his prop of protracted adolescence, an unlit pipe; Belford, a mountain of ill-contained avoirdupois, surmounted by the shifting suets of a balding cranium . . .

Bestowing a frosty nod on each pupil, the professor continued, "Today I quit my ridiculous profession."

(Rosner: doleful nod, sanctioning an unavoidable personal loss; Belford: sardonic lip-twist of unalloyed pleasure.) "I have yet to fathom the purpose of philosophy. If only, after four decades of Venn Diagrams, of Übermenschen and dialectical materialism, I could piece out a viable reason for the blather. Bah!"

Sunlight straggled through dusty windows. Belford impatiently shifted in his seat, rearranging bulges. Lubermayer paused, hovered like a serpent preparing to strike . . .

And struck.

"The worth of philosophy, if you will! That is the theme. Come, come, gentlemen, order your thoughts! Rosner—!"

The neat little scholar jerked, startled by the peremptory tone of command. Dimly aware he was on trial and not simply satisfying the whim of idle pedagogical curiosity, he tried to frame a suitable reply. "I suppose," he murmured, gesturing with his pipe-stem in unconscious mimesis of masculinity, "I suppose the safest answer would be that the proper pursuit of philosophy is the nature of man, the discovery of the Good, the seeking-out of an unshakable ethical underpinning to the tenets of comparative morality." He was pleased with his sonority.

"Precisely evaluated, Rosner," the professor rumbled, a sour grin on his pursed lips. "The *safest* answer—exactly so. And you, Belford?"

The mountain stirred, preparing to unroll the proclamation of his thoughts. Daring contradiction, he addressed Lubermayer without respect, and, with a fierce riposte in abeyance, his fingers brushed the opening of his jacket pocket, a gesture derived from viewing too many westerns.

"The purpose of the philosopher," he pontificated, "and the rationale of the philosophic function is to fer-

ret out the springs and causes of the cosmos, and to determine the eventual destiny of humanity—” (Verbal rapier drawn, he poised himself for his old argument with the professor.) “—but, Lubermayer, such a pursuit must be mounted in a pragmatic, rational frame of reference! Metaphysics and the study of the occult is twaddle of—”

“*Sufficient, Belford!*” the professor tartly interposed, wearily but not without relish. “You also fulfill my expectations. I am now in a position to recommend to the faculty committee with respect to the doctoral candidacies of both—”

“WHAT?!” Belford roared, thumping the table with his fist. “Do you mean to foist off this farce as our oral examinations?! A single random answer extracted impromptu—”

“Belford,” the professor interrupted, “you are a braying ass. I have worked with the pair of you for months and know your many limitations quite thoroughly. Rosner is a conglomerate of shortcomings: shallow perceptions; unscholarly complacency . . . but with a single talent: precerebral performance of the lowest work standard commensurate with continued degree candidacy. He is a willing debate participant, though prolixity preserves him from frequency of invitation to indulge the same. His dissertation: sound. The content: exegesis of a particularly trival Hegelian conclusion. Genuine scholarship, but of such inconsequential stamp that the tome will molder in the library stacks unread. However—” Lubermayer indulged in the personal luxury of a deep sigh. “—Rosner, I have no alternative but to approve your candidacy for the doctorate.” (Rosner: relaxed, daring his complacent smile once more; Belford: quaking mass of blubber, his hypothetical academic honor sullied by extension to an

unworthy colleague, an attitude not altogether unjustified. He fingered the weapon again.)

Nos habebit hu-u-mus—

“Raggletaggle vagabonds,” Belford murmured to himself, characterizing the undergraduates outside whose lung power was able to penetrate windowpanes with the force of their offkey caroling.

“As for you, Belford,” the professor continued, “you possess much of the genius wanted in Rosner. But you severely lack discipline. Furthermore, your mind is closed. You are a self-styled realist, which is laughable, since you prefer constructing illusions of your own, rather than countenancing the evidence of your senses—”

“I know precisely what you are getting at!” Belford rumbled, his ample chins trembling. “Those idiotic *séances* of yours that you forced me to attend!”

The pedagogue, ignoring the interruption, offered deliberate insult by explaining his position to the muddle-brained Rosner. “You see, Belford bases his dissertation upon metaphysics, or rather, upon the systematic attack and refutation of certain aspects of same. Entirely unacceptable. Doctoral petition: denied.”

“You *dare* to turn me down?!” the fat man shouted, his inflamed veins throbbing in his forehead. “Simply because I will not pander to your preposterous belief in *ghosts*?!”

“They exist,” said Lubermayer complacently. “A wealth of reliable observations from every clime—”

“Perfect rot! Those damned mediums you—”

“From Plato and the Bible,” the professor told Rosner, “and even through Belford’s beloved Nietzsche, all treat the spirit as distinct entity. The state of sentience, uncharted, shade apart, shape without form: mass beyond mortality.”

Belford snorted, his hand deeper in his pocket. “And

because I do not agree with this mumbo-jumbo, you refuse my dissertation?"

"I do!"

The antagonists faced one another across the narrow table, but Lubermayer's superior hostility icily quelled Belford, if only momentarily. Eyes downcast, he tried a new, wheedling tack.

"Professor," he murmured, "I am not in the habit of beseeching favors—" He took a breath, marshalling his nerve to beg a boon. "—but I have recently learned that I do not command a lengthy life-span. I am expected to die in a few months." Rosner made a sympathetic clucking noise. "Before I expire, I should like to know that I will be awarded my doctorate, even if it is posthumous."

Lubermayer wasted a long moment of Belford's dwindling time. At length, he spoke with renewed acerbity.

"It appears, then, Belford, that you will soon be in a position to test for yourself the accuracy of my metaphysical posture. When you find that you yourself have become a ghost—"

"I have already considered that contingency!"

Sudden silence.

Belford's hand, withdrawing from one pocket, delved into another . . .

"What *are* you talking about, Belford?"

"Sign this," said the fat man, producing a document from his inner jacket pocket and smoothing the official-looking paper on the tabletop. He pushed it towards Lubermayer.

"What is it?" the professor asked testily, unused to surprises from Belford.

"It is a contract to be entered into by you and me. Rosner may witness it."

"A contract? What does it specify?"

"That, upon the death of either one of us, whichever comes first, the deceased shall attempt to communicate with the survivor. If he fails to do so in a reasonable period of time, the college must then accord me my degree, even though it be posthumous."

—*habebit hu-u-mus*—

"You will lose, Belford," the professor growled, signing the paper and passing it to Rosner. "The human spirit survives death. When you are gone—"

"I am sorry to contradict you," said Belford, "but I will *not* lose, Professor Lubermayer!" His fidgeting hand withdrew from his outer jacket pocket and produced a revolver.

A shot rang out.

Rosner's signature upon the deed trailed off in a ragged path of ink, mixed with the professor's spattered blood. Lubermayer, with an admonitory finger thrust into the air, toppled over backward from the force of the bullet. Rosner jumped to one side, shouting.

Belford spread his hands wide and spoke in a voice that mimicked the late professor. "Lubermayer: dead."

"My God, Belford," screamed the other scholar, "what *have* you done?"

"Come, come, Rosner," said Belford, placing the pistol against his own temple, "a philosopher must be trained to observe the phenomena of the physical universe. You have just witnessed an event in space-time. What is the evidence of your senses as to what occurred? And have you seen the thing-in-itself, or a fragmentation of the Real in the turnings of subjectivity that your own mind shapes? Then, for that matter, Rosner, what *is* reality? What, illusion?"

Not choosing to debate, Rosner rushed pell-mell from the room, the voice of Belford bellowing after him to remember the contract.

Then there was another shot.

Rosner heard no more. Wrenching open the outer door of the building, he plunged into the quadrangle where the drunken freshmen tirelessly continued to caterwaul.

*Vita nostra brevis est,
Breve finietur—*

Returning soon with a quaking pair of campus policemen, Rosner saw Belford lying on the floor next to Lubermayer, a hole in his shattered skull, a triumphant smile on his bloodless lips, and the contract clutched tightly in his dead fat fist.

“Come here, Belford!” Lubermayer snapped.

The obese scholar approached, averting his eyes from Lubermayer’s angry glare. Belford stared morosely at the first ragged bullet-hole he had created.

“Before you so rudely interrupted me,” snarled the professor, “I *was* maintaining that the spirit is immortal. Now pray observe:

Proposition A Dead men who see, hear, and speak are ghosts.

Proposition B The two of us are dead.

Proposition C The two of us see, hear, and speak.

ERGO: *We are ghosts.*

Q. E. D.”

The cold wind whipped the professor’s long, unruly sideburns against his brow and spectacles. He glowered at Belford, then continued. “Therefore, sir, it must be at last obvious—even to you—that, thanks to this enforced field trip and practicum, I cannot possibly accept your dissertation.”

The professor curled his lip in derision and Belford flinched.

"In other words, Belford," snapped Lubermayer, "*you flunk!*"

Turning smartly on his heel, the professor strode off into the surrounding fog with an air of complete assurance. The strains of *Gaudeamus Igitur* tinged the edge of the wind like an echo's ghost. Belford glumly watched the other walk purposefully off into the mist.

He wondered where in hell Lubermayer was going.

THE CELERY STALK IN THE CELLAR

BY SARALEE TERRY

The celery stalk in the cellar
Gets bigger and bigger each day;
'Twas grown by an aged bank-teller
And it feeds on tobacco and hay.

It grows and it grows in the night-time;
Its flowers are pieces of chalk;
Its fruit-yield is three quarts of quicklime—
Oh, Lord! Now it's started to walk!

Oh, help! It's devoured the plumber!
(The garbageman ran up a tree)
It's gotten the landlady's number,
And now it's advancing on *me!!!*

Oh, goody, 'twas only a nightmare!
(I wake up and heave a big sigh)
Ere bedtime I solemnly now swear
No more to eat celery pie!

But hark! I hear noise on the stairways!
(My heart is beginning to balk)
AARGH! AT THE DOOR! FEEL MY
HAIR RAISE!
It's a ten-foot-high celery stalk!

Perhaps the greatest frisson of “Last Respects” is the contrast between the triviality of what actually takes place and what the characters experience within. In a deceptively matter-of-fact fashion, Dick Baldwin invests a gruesome, yet mundane, situation with a heavy burden of horror, all the more dreadful because it probably takes place day in, day out . . .

LAST RESPECTS

BY DICK BALDWIN

It was dark in the room. The window drapes were pulled, shutting out the bright mid-day sun. The only illumination came from a small wall light, masked from the rest of the drab chamber by a curtain drawn completely around the bed which stood directly under the lamp.

Two men stood outside the curtain. Their anxious silence was broken only by a distant moan from another room.

"We should begin," Berland said at last, swallowing with difficulty.

"Wait—" the other orderly responded, putting out his hand to stop his companion from opening the curtain. "Have we got everything?" He moved toward the stretcher to examine the supplies set out upon it.

Everything was there, but he checked it all again. A large green plastic sheet (folded into sixteenths), six narrow strips of black cloth, four manila tags (with information printed by the Floor Nurse), a basin of warm water mixed with germicidal soap, towels, and two pairs of rubber gloves (one size 6½, the other, 8).

McIlnoy tested the water. "It's cold," he complained. "Maybe I ought to get—"

His voice died as Berland twitched aside the bed curtain, drenching the room in ghastly yellow light. Both stared down, tense, acutely embarrassed.

The bed's occupant lay on his back. Glassy eyes stared wide at the ceiling. The toothless mouth gaped. The final convulsion had arched the neck so that the shoulders were slightly raised, curving the upper back like a keystone bridge. The gnarled fists clutched the hem of the patient's gown so tightly that the knuckles were a chalk-blue. But the rest of the skin was ashen.

McIlnoy turned away from the sight and put on the size 8 gloves. Berland gawked numbly at the corpse. After a moment, he spoke in a hushed voice.

"What do we do first?"

"Wash it, I think."

"I gave him a shower just this morning."

"Then why do you ask?" McIlnoy snapped. "We were in the same training class. You tell *me* what to do."

Berland shifted his weight uncomfortably from foot to foot, but said nothing.

"Look," the other argued, "they told us that bodies have to be washed before getting—"

"Well, I'm telling you he's already clean!"

"All right! Then where *do* we start?"

With a jerk of his hand, Berland indicated the thin gown tightly crumpled in the dead fists. "That will have to come off. One of us has to lift him so the other can untie the strings."

Neither moved. They stared at one another.

"*You're* wearing gloves," Berland murmured.

"There *is* another pair!" McIlnoy took the unused gloves and started to reach across the bed to hand them to Berland. Midway he changed his mind and tossed them instead, snapping back his arm.

Shuddering, Berland pulled on the gloves, then lifted the head. It looked so stiff, so unmovable, that he used too much force; it came up easily. As it did, the shoulders fell to the bed with a plop. Both men gasped, and

Berland dropped the head. It fell back to the pillow and rolled onto its left side. The eyes fixed vacantly on Berland's face.

"*You* pick him up," he told McIlnoy, trying to avoid the empty stare. McIlnoy flexed his fingers, hesitated, then suddenly grabbed the man by the shoulders and lifted. The head bobbed, twisted to the right, and came to rest three inches away from the second orderly's face.

"Hurry!" he urged Berland, who fumbled at the strings of the gown. They were soaked with sweat and badly knotted.

Someone in another room groaned.

At last, Berland got the final knot undone. McIlnoy quickly released the body. The top of the head, a paucity of hairs, snow white, tapped the headboard, bounced, then slid back down to the pillow.

Gently, they pulled the flimsy gown away from the sunken chest until it was halted by the firm hold on the hem of the dead man's clenched fists. Berland tugged. The hands held fast. He could have sworn they tightened their grip. He cursed. He wanted to slice off the dead fingers, sever the wrists, chop up the unfeeling hands—anything to speed the task. He yanked at the material. The movement made the body jump.

"Let's cut it off!" McIlnoy nervously suggested.

"*No!*" Berland snapped, thinking for a second that the other meant the hands. "I can get it!"

Sweating, he pulled again. There was a muted cracking sound within one of the corpse's arms. McIlnoy grasped the wrists. Berland yanked once more, and at last the gown came free. As it did, the claw-like hands unclenched.

Tossing the gown aside, Berland stood still for a moment, catching his breath. Then he looked at his companion and wanly tried to manage a smile.

"It shouldn't be too hard to close the eyes," he said lightly. "I've seen it done in hundreds of films." He placed his middle and index fingers on the lids and stroked downward. The eyes remained open. Pressing harder, he tried again. The lids moved, but rolled back when he took his fingers away. He tried a third time, applying still more force. He felt the tips of his fingers sink into soft membrane. He pulled his hand back violently and trembled.

"I can't do it. You try."

McIlnoy took a deep breath, held it. He felt sick. Putting his own fingers on the eye-lids, he stroked down while pushing up on the cheeks with the other hand. The eyes closed. They looked as if they were squinting. He slowly took his hands away. The lids stayed shut.

"Now the mouth."

It was rigid. They applied a combination of pressure upon the skull and jaw and at last, the mouth snapped shut. Immediately, the eyes sprang open. A hollow gurgle sounded from within the dead man's throat.

McIlnoy sprang back, yelping. "My God! He's not dead!"

"Get the mouth open!"

McIlnoy prized the jaws apart. Berland, feeling a little dizzy, stuck his hand into the gaping cavity. He grabbed the tongue, which had slipped down into the throat, and pulled it back up. He turned to McIlnoy. "It's liable to happen again. We'll have to clamp his mouth around it."

At length, they got both mouth and eyes closed and secured the jaw with a strip of black cloth, making a bow on the top of the head. The tongue dangled grotesquely over the thin, purple lips. They used another strip to hold the arms, which they folded across the chest. A third strip at the ankles kept the legs in place.

Next they took the blanket and top sheet, which were resting at the foot of the bed, and tossed them on the floor. They placed the green plastic shroud where the bedclothes had been and tugged on its inner right corner until it began to play out in fourths. McIlnoy lifted the legs. Berland brought the shroud under them until he reached the buttocks, which still touched the bed, then let the cloth go while he picked up the torso. His companion grasped the material and yanked it further up.

They worked quickly, intently, but were not unaware of the moans that still proceeded from some distant cubicle. The small room was hot; the air, thick. The single naked bulb glinted along the plastic shroud, making points of light that dazzled their eyes. The walls shimmered in the stifling heat as if they might collapse inward.

The plastic, fully opened, extended below the feet and above the head, as well as on either side of the body. Berland affixed a manila tag to the right first toe, then folded the excess plastic up to the knees as McIlnoy took the upper residue and covered the face and neck with it. They lifted the surplus on either side, folded it across and tucked it in carefully so the patient was fully enclosed in the green, shiny sheath. They tied the covering with strips of cloth at the neck, chest, and feet and fastened tags to the chest and ankle ribbons.

The wrapping complete, they stepped back and regarded the nameless, faceless bundle. McIlnoy tittered nervously.

"It's like a Christmas present," he observed, then giggled. "How'd you like to find *that* beneath your tree?"

Berland began to laugh, a trifle hysterically. McIlnoy tried to quiet him at first, but then he, too, was swept

into the mirth. He remembered the head hitting the headboard, and somehow the pun struck him as the funniest thing in the world.

At length, they subsided in a fit of coughing. After they caught their breath, they stared at one another somewhat ashamed.

"We'd better get him onto the stretcher," said Berland.

He pushed it up flush against the left side of the bed, but forgot to lock the wheels. McIlnoy cranked the bed up level to its fullest height. They hefted the corpse by the bottom bed-sheet and moved it toward the stretcher. But the dead weight, sagging against the unanchored vehicle, pushed it away. They lowered the bundle, but there was nothing solid to rest it on. It twisted from their grasp and fell to the floor. As it did, escaping air billowed the shroud from within. McIlnoy regarded the ballooning plastic and shook his head.

"Looks like he's breathing in there," he said. "Imagine if he were still alive!"

Berland glared at him. "Knock it off!" Moving the stretcher back, he ran over the legs. They set the vehicle to one side, fixed the casters in place, and struggled with the corpse until they got it on the platform. McIlnoy strapped it on and Berland spread the white bed-sheet over the body.

After the gloomy room, the hallway seemed remarkably bright. The air was much fresher. They wheeled the body down a hall past closed doors. Within, the patients were oddly silent, and the only noises in the corridor were the squeal of metal casters and the scrabbling sound of the rustling shroud.

They stopped in front of the elevator doors. McIlnoy sighed in exhaustion, pushing the button. "The worst is over," he said. "From here on, the morgue attendant takes care of the rest."

"And that is the worst," said the other, shuddering. "The other day, I had lunch with an inhalation therapist who went to embalming school. She said that when muscular contractions set in, it's not unusual for corpses to move around, sit up—"

McIlnoy gestured. "Please! I don't want to hear about it."

It took the decrepit elevator ten minutes to arrive. When the doors opened, they had to shove and strain to fit the stretcher into the small car. After much effort, they managed it, but McIlnoy was practically pinned against the back wall by the vehicle. Berland, nearer to the panel of buttons, had to sit on the stretcher to reach them. He pushed the basement button.

The doors closed.

The car descended slowly, jerkily. When it was halfway between the first and second floors, the elevator shivered to a halt.

The lights went out.

Robert Bloch is best known for "Psycho" and similar gruesome yarns, but anyone who has heard him speak will surely agree that Bloch's greatest horrors are the puns he perpetrates on his helpless listener-victims. It is not well known that Bloch wrote several galumphing burlesques back in his early days as a contributor to "Weird Tales." The present example gets in plenty of swipes at the insane-scientist-on-a-desert-isle genre, but holds off the heavy artillery for the real villains of our McLuhanesque society. Oh, yes, there is plenty of punishment, as well . . .

THE STRANGE ISLAND OF DOCTOR NORK

BY ROBERT BLOCH

I

Between the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles rises a little group of islands known as the Medium-Sized Antilles.

Mere pimples on the smiling face of the Caribbean, they remain unsqueezed by the hands of man.

Far off the usual trade routes, their shores are only infrequently desecrated by a banana peeling washed off a United Fruit Lines boat.

It was here that I came on the fateful day in August, my monoplane circling until it descended upon the broad, sandy beach of the central island—the strange island of Doctor Nork.

II

How Sidney Dearborn ever heard of Doctor Nork, I cannot say. The old dingbat, doddering around the confines of his palatial estate, seldom pays much attention to his news magazines, let alone interesting himself in the doings of a mere individual.

But probably even a man like Dearborn who is devoting most of his time to becoming an octogenarian—has been for the past eighty years—occasionally pauses and reads the papers.

Quite possibly, Dearborn read an article about Doctor Nork in one of his own magazines. I can see him calling my editor in New York.

“Hello—this is Dearborn. Get me an exclusive feature interview on Nork.

“Nork. Nork! No, I’m not sick. Fella’s name. N-o-r-k. Big scientist. Lives alone on an island someplace, doing experiments.

“How do I know what kind of experiments? Find out for me. Tell our readers. That’s what I’m paying you fifty grand a year for—to find out facts.

“This story on Nork is drivel. Pure drivel. No facts. It says he’s endowed by a lot of foundations. Endowed for what? Can he split an atom? Get me all the dope.

“Know what I think? I smell Communism, that’s what I smell. What would a big scientist want to hide out on an island for if he wasn’t afraid? The American people deserve to know.

“Well, send a man down to see him. Interview him. I want a complete writeup on Nork within ten days. And say—hello, hello—I want you to be sure and find out where he stands on the oleomargarine tax!”*

That’s the way the conversation probably went. I can only guess. All I know is that the managing editor

* Back in the dim past, when this story was written, the dairy interests objected to competition from lower-priced spreads, so they lobbied for laws to tax oleomargarine and in many states it was even forbidden to sell oleo the color of butter. (The color had to be wearily added by the homemaker.) These measures were most effective, as can be seen by noting the status of both industries today.—MK

called me into the front office and gave me the assignment.

"Charter a plane," he said. "Get there, get the yarn, and get back. Get it?"

I got it, but good.

III

The smooth yellow beach on which my monoplane had landed evidently girdled the island, which was approximately a mile in diameter. Inland, palmettos crusted thickly in a dense jungle that ended abruptly at the foot of a gigantic cliff occupying the island's center. Monkeys, macaws, toucans, and parakeets set up a Disney-like clatter as I toted my suitcase and portable typewriter across the sands, but there was no evidence of human life—not even a Burma-Shave sign.

For a moment I wondered if I had made a mistake. I felt like Robinson Crusoe, and remembered the stirring episode where he discovers in the sand the imprint of a naked human foot.

Then I gasped. *I was Robinson Crusoe.* For there, before me in the golden sand, was the symbol of life itself! Not the raw imprint of savage life, but the very essence of civilization.

It was an old Pepsi-Cola bottle.

I stooped down to pick it up and then noted, with a sudden shock, that the bottle was not empty.

A soggy, crumpled sheet of paper had been stuffed down the neck, which was sealed with a battered cap. I pried it loose, then fished out the parchment and unfolded the sheet. The message was written in a childish scrawl.

To Whom It May Concern:
Doctor Nork is a mean, nasty old
thing, so there!

(Signed) A True Friend

So I *was* on the right island, after all. My elation subsided as I realized "A True Friend's" warning about my future host. Well, it was no concern of mine. For all I knew, "A True Friend" might be a far meaner and nastier old thing than Doctor Nork.

At any rate, I wasn't here to sit in judgment; I was here to get a story on the mysterious medico.

Resealing the message in the bottle, I tossed it into the water. Apparently that had been "A True Friend's" intention, but his aim was bad.

I toted my luggage toward the palmetto forest as the macaws formed a screaming rainbow round my head.

Oh, those living flames of beauty! Oh, those lovely, lambent—"Oh, for crying out loud!"

I muttered.

Apparently it was safer to walk under the shelter of the trees.

IV

I was still wiping my pith helmet when I felt a hand tap my shoulder. I wheeled, then recoiled in horror. It hadn't been a hand on my shoulder, after all. I beheld a paw.

Crouching, confronting me, was the shaggy shambling figure of a gigantic great ape. Gorilla-eyes glared, and a tusked maw gaped wide in slavering dread. A growl rumbled up into the threatening throat. "You want handkerchief?" said the ape. The intonation was

bestial, but the words were human, intelligible. I stared, gulped, and shook my head in amazement.

"Who you fella?" the ape demanded. "You fella come safari?"

I shook my head again, but the hallucination didn't disappear.

"You come in jungle, hunt for diamonds, gold, no? You seek Elephants' Graveyard, maybe, heap much ivory?"

I could only goggle.

"You *bwana* search for White Goddess?"

I shrugged my heart back out of my mouth and down to where it belonged. Then I found my voice again. "You—you can actually talk!" I gasped. "I—never thought I'd live to hear a gorilla talk like that."

The ape grimaced dreadfully.

"Sounds pretty corny, eh, Jack? I think so, too—all that pidgin English and fake native lingo. Strictly from hunger. But you know how it is with the Doc—he makes me talk that way, says it's what they want to hear.

"Sometimes I get pretty ashamed when I think that an anthropoid of my education has to go around making like a *schmoe*, but I've got my orders. Like I say, you know the Doc."

"But I don't know the Doc," I answered. "That's just what I came down for; I want to meet him."

"You from the publishers?" asked the gorilla.

"News magazine," I replied. "I'm here for an interview."

"Might have known it," the ape muttered. "You don't have a mustache. Thought you were a villain at first; but the villains all have mustaches, don't they?"

I was getting confused again.

The anthropoid ignored my bewilderment and cour-

teously relieved me of my luggage. "Come on," he growled. "Follow me."

He led a path through the palmettos. "Reporter, eh?" he mused. "What do you do evenings?"

"How do you mean?"

"Fly, hurtle, sail, batter, flame, or blast?"

"I don't understand," I confessed. "You must have me mixed up with somebody else. Evenings, I go home. Sometimes I look up a friend and play a little Gin Rummy."

"Tell you what you do," the gorilla suggested. "When you get done with the Doc, look me up and I'll take you on for a few hands."

V

The cliff-top was a broad, flat plateau overlooking the beach and sea below. The wind blew cold and clear across the treeless expanse, and borne upon its eddies the seagulls wheeled and circled. Remembering the macaws, I made an instinctive grab for my solar topee and jammed it down over my forehead. Then I peered out under its brim at the domicile of Doctor Nork.

Nork's residence sprawled across the plateau like some gigantic concrete wheel. A white-domed central structure acted as the hub, from which extended a half-dozen radii in the shape of wings attached to the main building. The outer circumference was rimmed by a high stone fence, broken by a single gate. The ape led me towards it while I stared up in marvel at the elaborate structure set upon a lonely tropical isle.

Then we were standing before the gate, which appar-

ently served as a front door. I noted a neatly lettered sign reading:

ERASMUS NORK, M.D.
Doctor is in—Please be seated

I had nothing to sit on but my valise. The gorilla opened the front door and bid me enter. He shambled into a spacious white hallway, its antiseptic decor reminiscent of an old Doctor Kildare movie. I followed him as we walked along the corridor, passing half a dozen closed doors in succession. Finally we paused before a large double-door at the end of the hall.

"I'll announce you," the ape suggested. "Doctor Nork is conducting an experiment."

He skipped through the half-open doorway and disappeared. I stood in the hall and listened to the drone of a faraway dynamo. It accented the eeriness of this white palace set in the heart of a tropical jungle. Weird scientific experiments and talking apes—

"Come right in, my friend!" The booming voice resounded from the room behind the door. "Welcome to the Island!" I stepped forward into the laboratory of Doctor Nork.

A great arc-light glared from the dome roof, glared down upon a scene of horror. A huge steel operating table occupied the center of the room, and it was in use. Strapped securely to its surface was a half-clad girl, hair streaming, mouth contorted, eyes wide with terror.

Towering above her was a tall, thin, red-bearded man with a beaked nose and slanted eyes. Like a surgeon, he wore a white gown. Like a surgeon, he brandished a glittering knife. Even as I watched, he raised

the cruel blade and his arms swooped down to the girl's bare white bosom.

The red-bearded man grinned exultantly. "How's tricks?" he whispered. The knife came down—

"Stop!"

I plunged forward frantically. Hairy arms pinioned me from behind. The ape held me fast.

"Hold it!" snarled the red-bearded man. "There—got it?"

"Swell, Boss!" squeaked an unfamiliar voice from the corner of the room. I twisted my head and saw a little man with a smöck standing before an easel. Even as I watched, he did things to the tripod stand, folding it under his arm, and gathering the board up, scuffled from the room.

The tall man dropped the knife and fumbled with the cords binding the girl.

"Curse these knots!" he grumbled. "Ought to use the disintegrator. There you are, Toots."

The girl stood up and fluffed out her hair. She smiled at me—no, past me, over my shoulder where the ape stood.

"How's for a little Gin?" she said.

The gorilla nodded and released me. Linked arm in arm, girl and gorilla ambled from the room. And the tall, red-bearded man gestured towards me with his knife.

"Sit down, my friend," he said. "You must be tired after your trip. Maybe you'd prefer to lie down—how about right here, on the operating table?"

"No thanks," I gulped. "You're Doctor Nork, I presume?"

"Of course. Glad to see you. It isn't often we get a chance to converse with a representative of civilization. You must tell me all that's happening in the world. Has the atomic bomb blown up any continents lately?"

"I don't know—I left New York yesterday," I answered.

Nork shrugged. "So you came all the way down here just for an interview, eh? I suppose you want to discuss the new slants we worked out?"

"Slants?" I fumbled for his meaning. "I was sent here to find out something about your experiments. I hear you are conducting some mysterious investigations."

"Mysterious investigations? Experiments? My dear sir, you've been badly misled. I'm a business man. This is a business office." Doctor Nork took out a strop and began to sharpen his knife, splitting hairs from his beard to test the keen edge of the blade.

"But I heard—"

"You were mistaken." Nork spoke curtly.

At that moment the door opened and the gorilla entered.

"Hey, Doc, those guys are here for the experiments," he announced.

Nork blushed and avoided my accusing stare.

"Tell them I'm busy," he barked. "Tell them they'll have to wait."

"But the subject is already strapped down. The stenographer is ready. Everything is set up."

"Confound it!" muttered the Doctor. "Oh, very well!"

"You don't have to come down, Doc," the ape said. "Just give me the equipment and I'll take it to them."

Doctor Nork shrugged and stepped over to one of the blank, gleaming white laboratory walls. He pressed a tile and something clicked. A section of the wall slid back and revealed a long rack. Objects hung from thongs, dangled from hooks.

I stared at the display. There were long black whips,

short cats-of-nine-tails, blackjacks, truncheons, clubs, assegais, knobkerries, shillelaghs.

The gorilla lumbered over and selected an armful at random.

"This oughta do the trick, eh, Doc?"

Nork nodded. Another click and the wall slid back into place. He pressed a second tile. A grating wheeze echoed through the room as a portion of the floor moved to disclose a secret stairway descending into black depths below. The ape clambered down the steps, bearing his homicidal burden. With a loud clang, the floor closed behind him.

I reeled, bewildered. Whips, weapons, concealed passages, and a nameless experiment—what did it mean?

Nork feigned nonchalance as he faced me.

"Come on," I said. "Quit stalling. My editor sent me down here for a feature story and I intend to get it. Now I—"

My words were cut short, then drowned out by a ghastly shriek. It came from beneath my very feet; rising in a weird wail, an ululation of utter agony.

"What's that?" I gasped.

"I didn't hear anything," purred Nork.

Again the dreadful scream tore the air to ribbons.

"What's going on here?" I panted. "What does it all mean? What kind of experiment needs whips and bludgeons? What are they doing down there?"

"Oh, all right, I suppose I'll have to tell you," Nork sighed. "But it's really nothing at all. They're just beating the living hell out of a guy."

VI

I made a dive for the Doctor's bearded throat. "You fiend!" I shrieked. "Now I know what you are—a mad scientist!"

"Hey, cut it out!" yelled Nork. "You're tearing my beard!"

Indeed, the red beard came loose in my hands, revealing a smaller black beard beneath it.

"Don't touch the black beard—that's genuine!" warned the scientist. "I just wear the red for sketches. Red seems to be all the thing this season. Wait, let me explain things to you."

"Explain things? While you're torturing that poor devil down there in the cellar?"

"What poor devil? He's a volunteer. Also a confirmed masochist; he likes to be beaten up. Besides, I'm paying him five hundred dollars for his trouble."

"You're paying him five hundred dollars—?"

"Didn't I tell you this was business? Come on, I'll let you see for yourself."

The Doctor pressed the wall, the steps below were revealed, and I followed him down into the noisome darkness. As we passed into the nighted depths, the screams and groans rose hideously. The hair on my scalp followed suit.

We groped along a damp stone corridor until we reached a dimly lit room. It was a sight I never expected to see—a sight no man of the twentieth century should see—a medieval dungeon.

Torchlight flared on rack and strappado, on boot and Iron Maiden and wheel. Torchlight flickered down

on the table where the groaning man writhed beneath the blows of two gigantic blackamoors.

The ape stood by silently, hand resting on the shoulders of a small man who sat perched on a high stool. Head cocked attentively as though listening, the little man was frantically scribbling down shorthand jottings.

Thuds, curses, screeches, blows, moans, and gasps filled the air—but they faded into a sort of background noise as the little man beamed ecstatically and babbled at each fresh sound.

“WHUUP!” he yelled. “OOFFLE!”

“Huh?” I murmured.

“GUTCH! Boy, didja hear dat one, heh? GUTCH; Tha’s a new one, huh, Doc?” He peered over his spectacles and addressed the blackamoors. “Hey, how’s fer usin’ the brass knucks now? We ain’t had no brass knucks lately.”

“OK,” grunted the biggest of the Negroes. “Dat is, if’n it’s OK wid de victim.”

“OK, don’t mind me,” piped the man on the table, grinning up through the black-and-blue blur of his ravaged face. “I can take it.” Surprisingly, he giggled. “Lay on, MacDuff!”

The Negroes began to assail his midriff with brass knuckles. He howled and grunted at every blow.

“SPLATT!” yapped the stenographer on the stool. “Oh boy, lissen to him! URRK! BLIPP! WHIZZLE! Hey, you witha lead pipe—rap him onna noggin again, I did’n catch it the firs’ time. There! SPOOOIINNNGGG!!!”

Doctor Nork tapped me on the shoulder. “Had enough?” he whispered. I nodded.

“Let’s go.” He led the way back to the stairs, calling over his shoulder, “Don’t overdo it, boys, and be careful how you hit him. Last time you broke three whips and a truncheon. Those things cost money, you know.”

"BOING!" yelled the stenographer. **"BOINGA-BOINGA-BOINGA!"**

As we plodded up the steps, Nork sighed. "There's so much to worry about," he confided. "So much to do. It isn't easy, being the mastermind of all the comic books."

VII

We sat in another chamber, now—Doctor Nork's spacious and imposing library. A hundred shelves, rising to the dizzying height of the ceiling, encircled us on all sides. Every shelf was packed, crammed, jammed full of paperbound books with lurid covers. Nork reached over to an end-table and selected one at random, rifling the pages as he spoke.

"Of course, you can understand what we're doing down there, now," he said. "Just getting out blurbs, that's all. Filling the old balloons."

"Filling the what?"

"The balloons. You know—the things coming out of the characters' mouths in comic books. When a crook gets hit by the hero, he makes a noise. Or the weapon makes a noise. Sometimes they both make noises."

"Like BANG and OUCH?"

"There—you see?" Doctor Nork beamed. "We can't use BANG and OUCH all the time. Or WHAM and ZOWIE and POW. They're corny. Besides, the Flushing Chain of Comic Books covers about twenty titles a month—that means roughly five thousand separate panels of drawings. Now you figure that at least four thousand of those panels in every comic book represent somebody getting hit, lashed, flayed, burned, punched, beaten, shot, stabbed, or run over with a steamroller—

that takes a lot of different noises and sounds for balloons.

"We strive for variety, understand? But variety alone is not enough. My boss, the publisher, Bloodengore Flushing, is a stickler for realism. He wants accurate sounds. So that's why we hold experiments. We beat up a victim and take down the noises for our balloons. Get it?"

I got it, but couldn't handle it. "You mean to say your comic books are drawn from real life?"

"More or less. That's where I come in. Mr. Flushing pays me a fortune, my dear sir, to mastermind the Flushing Chain. He endowed this laboratory, set up a fund for research, took me under contract for that purpose alone—to make sure that the sixty million readers of such famous comics as *Captain Torture* and *Hatchet Man* get only the finest and most realistic literature.

"Why, would you believe it, when I took over he only published three comic books and two of them were actually funny?"

"It was ridiculous, and I told him so. Everybody knows that there's no point in a comic book that's funny! Why, people will laugh at it! What they want is thrills; girls with big busts and men with big muscles."

"I don't know much about comic books," I confessed. "I had rather a sketchy education. I thought people just wrote and drew them in some kind of an office."

"That's the old-fashioned way," Nork laughed. "Since I went to work for Flushing, we've changed all that. Ours is a great humanitarian enterprise; catering to sixty million readers as we do, bringing them romance, adventure, murder, arson, insanity, fratricide, bestiality. That's a great responsibility, my boy, and I am keenly aware of it.

"When I went to work for the Chain, I was just a

broken-down old Nobel Prize winner, puttering around in a laboratory. I smashed a few atoms, that's just about all I did. Now I am engaged in a great crusade to bring comic-book culture to the masses.

"That's why Flushing hired me. Up to the time I came here, comic books were put out just about the way you said they were: in offices, by artists and writers who worked solely with their imaginations. They kept thinking up new variants of Superman and that's about all they could do—occasionally they did a sort of Tarzan takeoff or a Dick Tracy imitation. But it was stale, flat, repetitious.

"You see, the trouble was that they lacked *facts* to go by. They went stale because they didn't know anything about their subject matter. None of them had ever been to the jungle, let alone lived with gorillas. None of them had ever used a ray-gun or split a Jap spy's head open with a butcher's cleaver. None of them could walk through walls, or put on a suit of red underwear and fly through the air.

"That's where I came in. I brought the scientific method to bear, the experimental approach. Now all the artists and writers work from rough sketches and material supplied by me, here in my laboratory. Everything you see in Flushing Comics has been pre-tested and is guaranteed accurate."

"You mean you've created a comic book world?" I gasped.

"More or less. Who do you think taught that gorilla to talk? I worked with him ever since he was a tiny rhesus; made him listen to Linguaphone records, everything. And why do you think our drawings are so accurate? Because I have an artist here sketching night and day; you saw me posing as the Mad Doctor with that girl when you came in. That's why I wore the false red beard—it looks better in color reproduction. Many

people have been kind enough to tell me that I make the best and most convincing Mad Doctor they've ever seen."

"I'm sure you do," I said, politely.

"Take those fellows downstairs—they're working on the sound effects, as I told you. All over this great laboratory, experiments are going on concurrently, and trained observers are noting the results; roughing out sketches, transcribing bits of dialogue, thinking up plots. The result is obvious—Flushing Comics today are beyond all doubt the most realistically gruesome, hideous, ghastly, sanguinary, and horrible comics in the world."

"But what about all those super-characters?" I asked. "You can teach gorillas to talk and pose for pictures and beat people up, but where do you get the ideas for those invincible heroes with the wonderful powers?"

"I give them the powers," purred Doctor Nork. "My experiments in nuclear physics, chemo-biology, endocrinology, and mopery have borne fruit. Strange fruit. As you shall presently see. Speaking of fruit, it's time for luncheon. And now you'll have an opportunity to meet some of the actual characters I have created for Flushing Comics."

VIII

Doctor Nork and I dined in palatial splendor. For the first few minutes after our entry into the huge hall, we were alone, save for the silent servants; tall, white-faced men who stared straight ahead in impassive obedience as they offered us our choice of delicacies.

"How well trained they are," I whispered, as one of

the black-liveried footmen served me a helping of jugged flamingo and pickled eland tongues. "They never say a word, do they?"

"Not remarkable at all," said Doctor Nork, as he carved the *pièce de résistance*—a huge baked wildebeeste head with an enormous apple in its mouth. "How can they say anything? Some of them are zombies and the rest of them are dead. I reanimated them myself, you know."

"I didn't know," I gulped. "And I'm not sure I want to. You actually raise corpses up to be your servants?"

"Sure. Don't you read the comics? Scientists are always going into their laboratories and shooting a lot of electrical arcs through bodies. Had to try it myself just for the sake of accuracy. It worked. And after I had these cadavers animated again, I had no other use for them except as servants. Still it worries me."

"Worries me, too," I agreed. "I don't like their looks."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," Nork replied. "I just don't want the Waiters Union to find out." He gnawed a yak-leg and offered me some jellied eel.

"Where are the others I was supposed to meet?" I asked.

"Others? They'll be along, I'm sure. Matter of fact, here they come now."

His remark was unnecessary. My bursting eardrums and bulging eyes attested to the arrival of some exceedingly strange strangers.

The first one to enter wasn't so bad—he was obviously human, despite his red cloak and the helmet he wore, which resembled an inverted *commode*. The only thing that disconcerted me in the least was the fact that he didn't walk in. He *flew*.

Behind him was a hopping figure. It might have been a gigantic frog with a human face. It might have

been a gigantic human with a frog's body. Whatever it was, I didn't care for it.

Right behind the batrachian being stalked a tall man who displayed remarkable stoicism, insofar as his hair seemed to be on fire.

Even as I stared, my attention was arrested, tried, and condemned by another gentleman whose exceedingly long neck seemed to be made of wood. This neck was surmounted by a most unconventional head—flat on top, hooked in the rear, and round in front. There were no features visible in the round surface, which was shiny and metallic.

My eyes were still fighting the battle of the bulge when the girl came in. She was tall, slim, alluring; her body a pale shaft of moonlight and her hair a shimmering simulacrum of the sun. She wore a combination of leopard-skin bra and shorts that were very pretty, in spots.

I saw no reason why she also needed to wear a large boa-constrictor for a scarf—but she did. One would assume that a wench with such long, lovely limbs might be satisfied to walk; but no, she had to ride on the back of a lion.

"Greetings!" said the girl, as the lion halted before us and began to slaver over my shoes.

"Hi," chirped Doctor Nork. He beamed at me. "Meet my daughter, Albino—the White Goddess of the Jungle."

"Your daughter?"

"Brought her up among the animals to be useful in my work. Decided to make a female Tarzan out of her at an early age, when she showed signs of inheriting my own fondness for wild game. You may not know it, but I used to be quite a sportsman myself. Earned quite a reputation as a deer-hunter in my youth—I was a fast man with a buck."

Albino sat down, unwound her snake, and replaced it with a napkin. She began to feed her lion from my plate.

"Pass the salt," she said.

I did so, trembling—a human saltshaker. She noticed my tremor and sniffed disdainfully.

"Where'd you find this jerk, Pa?" she asked. "You know I don't like sissies."

I was all set to give her a snappy comeback, but something choked off my flow of conversation. That something was the boa-constrictor, which now began to twine around my neck. I removed it hastily and wiped my hands on what I thought was a napkin. But napkins don't roar.

I took my hands out of the lion's mane and turned to Doctor Nork. "What an aggregation," I murmured.

"All normal people," he assured me. "At least, they were until I got to work on them. You see before you, my dear sir, the results of years of experiments. My daughter was just a plain, ordinary little girl until I taught her how to behave like a monkey. In her case, all that was required was a little child psychology. Instead of giving her a doll to play with, I gave her a talking gorilla. The rest followed easily.

"In some of the other cases, surgery was necessary. Take Water Boy, for example."

"Who?"

He indicated the frog-man. "One of Flushing Comics' most popular characters. I made him; raised him from a tadpole, as it were. As a result of a unique series of experiments, he's now more frog than human. It was a risky business to turn a man into a frog—more than once I thought he'd croak. But you can see for yourself how successful I've been."

Nork pointed at the man with the flaming hair. "That's Fire-Bug," he told me. "The Human Torch.

Goes around giving criminals the hot-foot. I developed his metabolism to the point where he can actually live on fire."

"That's why he's eating coal, eh?"

"Precisely. And as for our flying man, Rogers—"

"Buck Rogers?"

"No. Two-Dollar Rogers, we call him. He's twice as good as Buck."

I turned away in bewilderment. "Let me get this straight once and for all," I said. "You experiment on people and develop superhuman or unusual characteristics. Then you watch their actions and use what you see as the basis for plot-material in comic books."

"Right. Now—"

A violent pounding interrupted him. The strange being with the long wooden neck and the metallic head was using the blank spot where his face should be—using it as a walnut-cracker.

"Hammerhead," explained the Doctor. "Our readers get a bang out of him." He giggled. "Did you see our last issue featuring him? Had a sequence where he uses his head as an atom-smasher."

I tried to ignore the scientist's remarks and make a little time with Albino. But she obviously despised me for a weakling; just a poor coward who was probably secretly afraid of rhinoceri.

"Ow!"

The shout came from down at the end of the table. Hammerhead had accidentally banged the fingers of Fire-Bug.

"Look what you're doing, clumsy!" he yelled.

"Don't get hot under the collar," retorted Hammerhead.

For answer, Fire-Bug opened his mouth, but no remarks came out. Instead a six-foot tongue of living flame belched forth. Hammerhead ducked just in time,

but Two-Dollar Rogers got smoke in his eyes. Rising, cloak whirling about him in red fury, the superhuman flier whipped out a strange, gleaming weapon and leveled it at the human torch.

"I'll blast you!" he yelled. Lightning crackled from the muzzle, and Fire-Bug ducked as an atomic beam disintegrated the chair in which he had been sitting. At the same time, he let go with another burst of flame.

Water Boy opened his frog-mouth and extinguished the blaze, inelegantly but effectively.

"Wet smack!" screamed Rogers, leveling his weapon. Fire-Bug turned toward him, ready to blaze away. Hammerhead poised himself to pound him down.

"*Quiet!*" screamed Doctor Nork. "Cut it out—get out of here, all of you. If you can't learn to behave and get along with one another, I'll—I'll turn the Faceless Fiend loose on you!"

There was a deathly silence.

"There," said the Doctor. "That's telling them, eh? But where are you?"

"Here," I gasped. "Right here—under the table."

Albino sniffed.

"I—uh—dropped my fork," I said.

"You're scared," she accused. "I can tell by the way your hand trembles."

"What hand?"

"The one on my ankle. Take it off."

I rose and took my place again. "All right," I said. "I am scared. Who wouldn't be with all this blasting and firing and pounding going on?"

"If you think these characters are bad, you ought to see the Faceless Fiend," she told me.

"Who is he? I noticed everybody shut up when his name was mentioned."

Nork's face clouded. He sighed heavily and reached for a platter of breaded horse-kidneys. "One of my few

failures," he murmured. "Some of my agents spirited away a mass-murderer from the penal colony in French Guiana. That's where I get most of my subjects—you'll find that comic book characters are best when they have criminal minds.

"Anyhow, I intended to create a super-criminal for a new book. The man was frightfully disfigured, and as a first step I attempted to remedy his condition with plastic surgery. At the same time, I began psychiatric treatment with deep hypnosis; my aim was to uncondition all his reflexes and inhibit all his inhibitions. This I did, while working on his face to remove the scars.

"Alas, I did my work too well. I had him in a state of complete abandon, physically, long before his features were rebuilt by plastic surgery. As a matter of fact, I had just finished removing his old features and hadn't gotten around to building new ones when he—escaped. Ran away.

"Of course, when the poor fellow removed the bandages, he found that he had no face left at all. This, coupled with his mental unbalance, resulted in the creation of the perfect super-criminal: the Faceless Fiend.

"Nobody knows what he looks like, because he doesn't look like anyone. He has no scruples—just hatred of society. Gifted with superhuman cunning, he has managed to evade capture and even now is lurking somewhere on this island. I've sent my staff out time and time again to comb the jungles for him. I imported several beachcombers just to comb the beaches. But he eludes me.

"Meanwhile he swears vengeance on me and all my work. He threatens me in a million ways.

"I am convinced it is he who writes letters to the press denouncing comic books."

"Say, wait a minute," I said. "I wonder if he wrote that note?"

I told him about the message I'd found on the beach.

"That's his work," Nork nodded. "A dangerous adversary, my friend."

The gorilla shuffled into the room and tapped the Doctor on the shoulder.

"Sorry to interrupt," he said, "but it's time for you to come down to the crocodile pits. We're getting ready to draw that sequence where Wonder Child ties their tails into Boy Scout knots. If we get that out of the way this afternoon, we can go right on to the scene where he strangles his grandmother—right?"

"Right." Nork rose. "Excuse me," he said. "The press of business affairs. Perhaps you're tired. I'll ask Albino to see you to your room."

"Follow me," the girl urged. "Do you want to ride my lion?"

"No thanks, I'll walk."

We left the banquet hall and ascended a spiral staircase. The blonde girl led me into a handsomely furnished bedroom.

"Maybe a little sleep will quiet your nerves," she observed. The scorn in her voice was evident.

"I'll be all right, thanks," I said. "Oh—what's that?"

A rumbling rose, and the air was suddenly suffused with blue flame.

"Nothing at all, scaredy-cat," she snickered. "Just a little hurricane coming up, I suppose."

"Hurricane?"

I stared out of the window and saw that she spoke the truth.

IX

The storm was gathering over the tropical isle. Water boiled like lava across the beach. The palmettos prostrated themselves before the fury of the storm. Wind roared from all points of the compass, and the currents clashed overhead to tear the very air to ribbons.

A kaleidoscopic cloud of macaws blew across the island, followed by a white cumulus of seagulls—borne ruthlessly away by the violence of the elements.

“Quit shaking, you coward!” taunted the girl. “I’ll turn on the lights.” She did so. I collapsed across the bed, watching the onslaught of the storm. The walls trembled and I followed suit.

“Oh, you’re impossible,” she told me. “Just like all the other men I’ve ever met—afraid of everything.”

“You can’t blame me,” I replied. “After all, not everybody has had your advantages. Being brought up by a gorilla, and all that.”

“Never mind the excuses,” Albino said. “It doesn’t matter. I’ve been the White Goddess of the Jungle here for five years, and I’m getting pretty darn sick of it, too. Always waiting for some strong, handsome, virile he-man to come along and woo me, like they do in the comic books. And what do I get? A bunch of weaklings, namby-pamby characters who are afraid of everything—lions, snakes, hurricanes.”

“And you’re not afraid of anything?”

“Of course not.”

“You’re sure?”

There was a crash overhead and suddenly the lights went out. The room was black—an inky vacuum in the dark womb of storm.

I winced, but the girl's voice rose strong and clear in the darkness.

"I fear nothing," she told me. "Not even the Faceless Fiend himself."

"That's very good to hear. I'd hate to have caused you any discomfort."

"What's that?" I yelled. "Who said that?"

"Me. The Faceless Fiend."

"You're here—in this room?"

"Just came in through a secret staircase," the slow voice hissed. "I've been waiting to get my hands on you ever since you arrived."

"You don't say," I answered, hurling myself in the direction of the door. Thunder boomed and wind howled.

"Don't try to escape," chuckled the unseen presence. "You can't see in the dark, but I can. And I'm going to get you."

"Help!" I yelled. "Albino—save me!"

"Stay where you are," the girl commanded. "I'm coming."

"So am I!" cackled the menacing voice.

I whirled, then cried out.

"Ouch!" I yelled. Something hit me in the back of my neck.

It was the ceiling.

X

When I opened my eyes, I was lying strapped to a table in a long, narrow underground chamber. Blue light flickered in mephitic gloom. Crouching above me was a cloaked figure. I stared up and was rewarded only by a blank look. This creature, this monster, this

being with an empty gap between neck and hairline, was something not to be countenanced. It was beyond all doubt the Faceless Fiend. His chuckle sounded out of emptiness, slithering off the slimy walls.

"Don't look so unhappy, my friend," he purred. "You ought to thank me for rescuing you. Here you are, safe and sound in a nice, comfortable sewer, while above us the entire laboratory has collapsed."

"Collapsed? Was it lightning?"

"No, just rain. The place just melted away."

"How could that be?"

"Simple," explained my captor. "Doctor Nork built it all of guano. Apparently he didn't feed the seagulls enough cement. At any rate, the entire structure has been demolished—and your friends have all perished. No one is left but the two of us."

"Dead?" I cried. "All of them—you're sure?"

"Beyond a doubt. It's an end to the whole insane scheme; the comic books will go out of existence, and Doctor Nork will no longer be free to perpetrate his wicked experiments in the name of science."

"But the girl," I persisted. "Albino, she was in the room with us—"

"I snatched you through the trapdoor and down the secret staircase just in time. I'm afraid you'll have to face it. We're alone. And now, speaking of facing it—"

The cloaked figure stooped to the side of the table and rose again. One hand clutched a small saw. "Speaking of facing it," he continued, "I am about to perform a small experiment of my own. Ever since I lost my face, I've waited for a chance to find another. I hid down here in the sewers under the laboratories and bided my time. I didn't want to take a stupid mug like Nork's and I certainly wouldn't appropriate the visage of any of his monsters.

"But when you flew in to the island this morning, I

knew my long vigil was over. Sorry, I cannot offer you any anesthetic, but time is short."

"You—you mean you're going to steal my face?" I screamed.

"I prefer to think of it as a little face-lifting job," answered my captor. "Please now; just relax."

The Faceless Fiend bent forward, saw in hand. It was a typical scene from a comic-book story—as such, it probably would have delighted ten million dear little kiddies throughout the land. But it didn't amuse me in the least.

The saw grazed my neck—

A roar shattered the walls. A tawny blur bore the cloaked figure backwards into the shadows. There were screams, and growls, and other less pleasant noises generally heard only at presidential conventions or zoos.

"Good work!"

Albino was at my side, using the saw on the ropes that bound me. She gestured toward the shadows of the sewers beyond, where the lion was now creating a Bodiless Fiend.

"We got through the trapdoor in time, just behind you. Then part of the walls gave, and we were delayed—but not too long."

"Then it's true," I said. "The laboratory is destroyed?"

"Everything's gone," she sighed. "Even this sewer isn't safe much longer. Let's get out of here."

A crash accented her words. Turning, I saw that the shadowed portion of the sewer had disappeared, hiding both the lion and the Faceless Fiend from view forever beneath fresh debris.

"This way," Albino urged, pulling me along the corridor. "There should be a sewer outlet to the beach."

"Thanks for rescuing me," I panted.

"Think nothing of it," the girl answered. "That's just

a reflex action, you know. Been rescuing people for years now for the comics."

The damp walls of the sewer twisted and turned. We raced along, Albino taking a lithe-limbed lead. She rounded a curve ahead of me and I blundered forward.

Suddenly she screamed.

I turned the corner and grasped her arm.

"What's the matter?" I said.

The girl stood there shaking in a frenzy of fear.

"Eeeeh!" she shrieked. "Take it away!"

"Huh?" I said. For answer, she clung to me and threw herself forward and upward into my arms. I held her close.

"Look!" she sobbed. "Down there—make it go away!"

"Where?" I asked.

"There."

"But—it's only a mouse," I said.

She began to cry. I stepped forward, carrying her in my arms, and the mouse retreated to its burrow with a shrill squeak.

Albino was weeping hysterically, and the more she cried the more I grinned.

"There, there," I said. "Don't you worry. I'll protect you."

There isn't much more to tell. By the time we emerged upon the broad expanse of the beach, the hurricane had blown away and only a gentle rain fell upon the ruins of the big laboratory on the cliff.

Despite my fears, I found the plane quite undamaged, save for a minor accident that had crumpled part of the landing gear. As it was, I managed a takeoff and a subsequent landing some hours later in the airport at Jamaica.

Within a day Albino and I were back in civilization. I managed to sell her on the notion, while *en route*,

that her brand of courage was of no value in New York.

"People seldom encounter lions and tigers in the city," I told her, "but the place is simply lousy with mice. What you need is someone like me to protect you."

She agreed, meekly enough. And that's why we were married, even before I reported to my editor with the story.

That episode is still painful in my memory. Being called a liar and a drunkard is bad enough, but when he accused me of opium-smoking, there was only one course left open to me.

"I resign!" I shouted, as he booted me down the stairs.

Still, it's all over now, and Albino doesn't mind. I have a new job—bought a little newsstand over on Seventh Avenue. I don't make much money selling newspapers, but there's always enough to buy a few mousetraps for the house.

Besides, I manage to sell quite a lot of comic books . . .

Actor, director, playwright, author of the harrowing horror novel, "Darker Places," Parke Godwin here contributes a sly tale of venomous urbanity.

UNSIGNED ORIGINAL

BY PARKE GODWIN

"Murder as a literary art is quite dead, of course," said Renquist, as his back, which was presented to me, heaved with eloquent regret. "There remains only refinement of the act itself," he added, pouring the brandy.

He brought the Martel flanked by our poured snifters on a silver tray to the chess table between us; and so we settled for the wet evening, sixtyish and solitary, in Renquist's quiet house, given to brandy and reminiscence and precious little else any more.

"You'll have to stay the night, Tarking," Renquist invited. "You can't order a cab, my phone's out, and there's no bus till morning."

"Why not?" I eased back in the well-upholstered chair. "I've nothing else to do."

"There you have it," Renquist nodded forlornly. "Like our art, we're superfluous—dead, dead, dead; at best, black-veiled mourners at a paper bier."

It might be said, if not already obvious, that there was always something *de trop* about Renquist. He over-presented himself like someone aspiring to an exclusive club and not altogether secure in his qualifications. *Florid* would describe his speech, complexion, and, more often than not, his prose. As his person, so his house. The built-in bookshelves were punctuated with studiously *outré* prints and drawings, a few Beardsleys,

mostly the renounced monstrosities from *Lysistrata*, an original Bok worth quite a bit now, several of the darker Goyas, and what appeared to be a Clarke, though subtly altered.

"There are murders more than ever," I reminded him.

"I said *art*," Renquist grumbled, tugging his vest over an expanding middle. "Not a mere statistic. More murders, yes: more bloody-minded amateurs cluttering the streets with their plebeian passions, shooting, cutting—mere ballistic and surgical demonstrations. But where," Renquist deplored, "is the *style*, the originality, the development of the puzzle?"

His gesture of regret sharpened to an index finger jabbed at the rows of books along one wall.

"There they lie, Tarking, all of them. Poe, Conan-Doyle, James, Bulwer-Lytton—all the Gothics. Christie, Sayers, Rinehart, with their trim little tea-with-the-vicar mysteries. The master mechanics: Carr, Gardner, Stout's brilliant obesity issuing *dictums* from the house on 35th Street. The less skillful moderns with their depressing penchant for hustling a maiden into bed rather than an early grave. There *you* are, Tarking," his hand revered my seven slim volumes, like funerary urns in a special compartment, "and finally, myself": the full, tight-wedged bottom shelf.

"This isn't a bookcase, Tarking, it's a damned mortuary. We still live in a murdering world, but to write a superb mystery for its edification today is like serving an exquisitely sautéed shad roe to a red-neck raised on grits: one voice pronouncing 'murder' correctly in a crowd of homicidal hare-lips—"

I hid my tired smile. In thirty years, I had written seven mysteries; he had ground out twenty, all of them direct descendants of mine, plagiarized, varied, and—admittedly—developed to their last possible plot ramifi-

cation, but originality was beyond him. He was a pianist rendering endless variations on a given theme without the ability to pen one honest note of his own. The knowledge made Renquist by turns solicitous and patronizing toward me, as a goldsmith fashioning high art from the element I merely mined. He read my thought as my eye rested on the fat shelf of his books and the handful of my own,

"Yes, I've copied you, Tarking. Say rather developed, improved. You were brilliant," he allowed, "but lazy and wasteful. Could have gotten five books from the ideas you poured into one."

"I lose interest." I swirled the brandy in my glass, musing on its color. "The difference between research and development. One is fascinating, the other mere drudgery."

"Touché." Renquist was genial, despite the home shot. "Still, we've remained friends. In memoriam then. To a lost art."

I frowned at the amber liquid in my glass and touched it to my lips.

"There is a glimmer of hope." Renquist eased back in the Chippendale. "The Muldauer murder. Surely you've read the papers."

"Yes, the commissioner of police. He won't be missed. Heartwarminglly venal, I hear."

"Passionately. And beautifully dispatched. Broad daylight, a dozen people around, drilled in his driveway, probably with a silencer."

"Suspects?"

"Thousands!" Renquist hooted joyously. "A neat thousand with as many motives. Needle in a bushel of needles. Result—zero, blank, immaculate."

"You look as satisfied as if you'd done it yourself."

I was granted a look which only Renquist would

have described as enigmatic. "No," he admitted, "but I damn well wish I had."

His glance followed mine to the picture on the wall just behind him that I'd thought earlier was a Clarke. There was an alien element in the elongated figures, a vitality that Clarke would have avoided on principle.

"That print," I leaned forward to it. "Is that . . . ?"

Renquist beamed with pleasure. "I wondered when you'd notice that." He rose energetically and went to the picture. "Not Clarke—my own, my improvement on him. His figures look as if they'd lived all their two-dimensional lives in that uncomfortable position. Mine have all his aura of the macabre, but at *least* they give you the impression they might have gone to the bathroom once in a while."

With one careful finger tip, he brushed imaginary dust from the picture. "I should have been a critic, Tarking. Improvement is my ruling passion."

Renquist sighed—somewhat stagily, I thought.

"But," he said, "there are no new plots, no unique methods, the revels ended, the puzzles all undone, charted, catalogued . . . dead. I can no longer create paper mayhem to titillate a world grown numb with crass genocide. *Ergo* . . ."

He turned back to me and picked up the snifter with a flourish. "Therefore, Tarking, I've thought to take up the act itself as an art form, select one prominent person at a time and dispose of him with no clues whatever." He raised the glass again. "To a new career."

My involuntary laugh hurt him.

"I'm *serious*, Tarking."

"You're nothing of the sort," I boshed him. "You're fifty-eight and sedentary and, bless you, you couldn't cut your finger without telling the world about it, with a note to your agent to retain the film rights."

Renquist laughed with me, conceding the point. "Well, then: to me."

We drank.

"Actually," he said, "the idea was yours to begin with."

"Weren't they all?"

"Oh, don't be pettish, Tarking! What have I stolen that I've not improved a hundredfold? Your second book, *No Darker Art*, held the whole system: murder as a hobby for a retired author of murder mysteries. The goal—"

"Yes, I remember."

"—to accumulate a series of unsolved, unsolvable crimes that would stand as a monument of enigma, and for my first," Renquist caressed the phrase with his tongue, "for my auspicious first, I'd choose someone fairly well in the public eye, yet sufficiently reclusive not to be missed for some time; perhaps someone I know."

He took another satisfied sip of his brandy; we looked at each other across the ticking of the clock.

"The implication is a bit broad-footed."

"A bit," Renquist purred.

"Myself."

"Just so." His smile was sugared Machiavelli. "A night chosen when my telephone decides to take a siesta, the body disposed in a pit already yawning in a corner of my large, dark cellar; police annoyed at widening intervals about my dear friend who hasn't even called. Think, Tarking: a series of such baroque leave-takings over, say, three years—researched, annotated, published, lauded. My *magnum opus*."

"A bit sick," I adjudged, "but not without merit of its kind. And the—uh—method?"

"Brandy," he smiled. "An excellent bottle. I wouldn't swing off a friend—and a connoisseur—on

rotgut, Tarking. A snifter of Martel, envenomed with a swift and painless demise."

I winced. " 'Envenomed,' Renquist? It reeks of First Folio."

He glared at my breach of decorum. "I *am* serious, damn your *savoir-faire*! It's working now, rummaging your vitals, very efficiently up to no good. And you, dear Tarking, are my first—perhaps my most poetically original—chapter."

From his expression, I was expected to utter something hackneyed—"You're mad, Renquist!" (in a cracked voice), or perhaps *For the love of God, Montresor*.

"Well, Tarking?"

"Not without holes," I put down my glass, "and not quite an innovation. First: I may have told someone I'd be here tonight."

"Not you," he chuckled. "You're gregarious as a clam. What reason would you have?"

"Any number of reasons, even casual."

"Your own phone," he said, "is turned off eight days out of ten. Your own cleaning woman thinks you're a myth. The odds are with me," Renquist concluded complacently. "What else?"

"Second—to a connoisseur, a good brandy is too clear to contain any toxin you could procure without clouding even slightly."

"Rot," he rode over me. "You drank it."

"I noticed it immediately. Looked like the results of bad plumbing."

"But you drank it!" Renquist's features were a caricature of triumph.

"Did I?"

"I *saw* you." Renquist tried to rise. The inability surprised him, the high furrows of astonishment on his

rapidly paling forehead starting out with perspiration. His breathing accelerated. "I didn't take my eyes off—"

"Except for one moment to admire your improvement on Clarke, to which I directed your egotistical attention. Ample time for the light of hand. If I was wrong, no harm done," I shrugged. "But as it is . . ."

He was sinking fast, horror-stricken, his hand jittering near his laboring heart. "Tarking . . . a doctor . . ."

"Your phone," I reminded him tactfully. "I really didn't plan it this way. Here you are, my *second* chapter, and—"

Renquist wheezed hideously and died.

—And he was supposed to be number three.

One of the earliest important English periodicals was Blackwood's, published in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, it was also well known for its scathing and ill-considered literary criticism. It was inevitable that many counterattacks would be launched, and one of the most amusing was Poe's "How to Write a Blackwood Article," in which the pretentious devotee of belles-letters, Signora Psyche Zenobia (known to her enemies as Suky Snobbs), interviews the publisher of Blackwood's magazine to learn how to sell to it. In addition to being told to drag in all sorts of extraneous pedanticism, she is informed that the best way to publish in Blackwood's is to undergo a disaster (terminal, if possible) and have the wits to write it down as it happens.

"It was my primary object," she writes at the close of the burlesque piece, "to get into some immediate difficulty" "A Predicament" was the result, a unique personal experience of considerable discomfort to the narrator, yet full of the most exquisite literary curlicues worthy of a Suky—pardon, Psyche Zenobia!

A PREDICAMENT

BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

What chance, good lady, hath bereft you thus?

Comus.

It was a quiet and still afternoon when I strolled forth in the goodly city of Edina. The confusion and bustle in the streets were terrible. Men were talking. Women were screaming. Children were choking. Pigs were whistling. Carts they rattled. Bulls they bellowed. Dogs they danced. *Danced!* Could it then be possible? *Danced!* Alas, thought I, *my* dancing days are over! Thus it is ever. What a host of gloomy recollections will ever and anon be awakened in the mind of genius and imaginative contemplation, especially of a genius doomed to the everlasting, and eternal, and continual, and, as one might say, the—*continued*—yes, the *continued and continuous*, bitter, harassing, disturbing, and, if I may be allowed the expression, the *very* disturbing influence of the serene, and god-like, and heavenly, and exalting, and elevated, and purifying effect of what may be rightly termed the most enviable, the most *truly* enviable—nay! the most benignly beautiful, the most deliciously ethereal, and, as it were, the most *pretty* (if I may use so bold an expression) *thing* (pardon me, gentle reader!) in the world—but I am always led away by my feelings. In *such* a mind, I repeat, what a host of recollections are stirred up by a trifle! The dogs

danced! I—I *could* not! They frisked—I wept. They capered—I sobbed aloud. Touching circumstances! which cannot fail to bring to the recollection of the classical reader that exquisite passage in relation to the fitness of things, which is to be found in the commencement of the third volume of that admirable and venerable Chinese novel the *Jo-Go-Slow*.

In my solitary walk through the city I had two humble but faithful companions. Diana, my poodle! sweetest of creatures! She had a quantity of hair over her one eye, and a blue riband tied fashionably around her neck. Diana was not more than five inches in height, but her head was somewhat bigger than her body, and her tail being cut off exceedingly close, gave an air of injured innocence to the interesting animal which rendered her a favorite with all.

And Pompey, my negro!—sweet Pompey! how shall I ever forget thee? I had taken Pompey's arm. He was three feet in height (I like to be particular) and about seventy, or perhaps eighty, years of age. He had bow-legs and was corpulent. His mouth should not be called small, nor his ears short. His teeth, however, were like pearl, and his large full eyes were deliciously white. Nature had endowed him with no neck, and had placed his ankles (as usual with that race) in the middle of the upper portion of the feet. He was clad with a striking simplicity. His sole garments were a stock of nine inches in height, and a nearly-new drab overcoat which had formerly been in the service of the tall, stately, and illustrious Dr. Moneypenny. It was a good overcoat. It was well cut. It was well made. The coat was nearly new. Pompey held it up out of the dirt with both hands.

There were three persons in our party, and two of them have already been the subject of remark. There was a third—that person was myself. I am the Signora

Psyche Zenobia. I am *not* Suky Snobbs. My appearance is commanding. On the memorable occasion of which I speak I was habited in a crimson satin dress, with a sky-blue Arabian *mantelet*. And the dress had trimmings of green *agraffas*, and seven graceful flounces of the orange-colored *auricula*. I thus formed the third of the party. There was the poodle. There was Pompey. There was myself. We were *three*. Thus it is said there were originally but three Furies—Melty, Nimmy, and Hetty—Meditation, Memory, and Fiddling.

Leaning upon the arm of the gallant Pompey, and attended at a respectable distance by Diana, I proceeded down one of the populous and very pleasant streets of the now deserted Edina. On a sudden, there presented itself to view a church—a Gothic cathedral—vast, venerable, and with a tall steeple, which towered into the sky. What madness now possessed me? Why did I rush upon my fate? I was seized with an uncontrollable desire to ascend the giddy pinnacle, and thence survey the immense extent of the city. The door of the cathedral stood invitingly open. My destiny prevailed. I entered the ominous archway. Where then was my guardian angel?—if indeed such angels there be. *If!* Distressing monosyllable! what a world of mystery, and meaning, and doubt, and uncertainty is there involved in thy two letters! I entered the ominous archway! I entered; and, without injury to my orange-colored *auriculas*, I passed beneath the portal, and emerged within the vestibule. Thus it is said the immense river Alfred passed, unscathed, and unwetted, beneath the sea.

I thought the staircase would never have an end. *Round!* Yes, they went round and up, and round and up and round and up, until I could not help surmising, with the sagacious Pompey, upon whose supporting arm I leaned in all the confidence of early afternoon—I *could* not help surmising that the upper end of the con-

tinuous spiral ladder had been accidentally, or perhaps designedly, removed. I paused for breath; and, in the meantime, an accident occurred of too momentous a nature in a moral, and also in a metaphysical point of view, to be passed over without notice. It appeared to me—indeed I was quite confident of the fact—I could not be mistaken—no! I had, for some moments, carefully and anxiously observed the motions of my Diana—I say that *I could not be mistaken*—Diana *smelt a rat!* At once I called Pompey's attention to the subject, and he—he agreed with me. There was then no longer any reasonable room for doubt. The rat had been smelled—and by Diana. Heavens! shall I ever forget the intense excitement of the moment? The rat!—it was there—that is to say, it was somewhere. Diana smelled the rat. I—*I could not!* Thus it is said the Prussian Iris has, for some persons, a sweet and very powerful perfume, while to others it is perfectly scentless.

The staircase had been surmounted, and there were now only three or four more upward steps intervening between us and the summit. We still ascended, and now only one step remained. One step! One little, little step! Upon one such little step in the great staircase of human life how vast a sum of human happiness or misery depends! I thought of myself, then of Pompey, and then of the mysterious and inexplicable destiny which surrounded us. I thought of Pompey!—alas, I thought of love! I thought of my many false *steps* which have been taken, and may be taken again. I resolved to be more cautious, more reserved. I abandoned the arm of Pompey, and, without his assistance, surmounted the one remaining step, and gained the chamber of the belfry. I was followed immediately afterward by my poodle. Pompey alone remained behind. I stood at the head of the staircase, and encouraged him to ascend. He stretched forth to me his hand, and unfortunately in

so doing was forced to abandon his firm hold upon the overcoat. Will the gods never cease their persecution? The overcoat is dropped, and, with one of his feet, Pompey stepped upon the long and trailing skirt of the overcoat. He stumbled and fell—this consequence was inevitable. He fell forward, and, with his accursed head, striking me full in the—in the breast, precipitated me headlong, together with himself, upon the hard, filthy, and detestable floor of the belfry. But my revenge was sure, sudden, and complete. Seizing him furiously by the wool with both hands, I tore out a vast quantity of black, and crisp, and curling material, and tossed it from me with every manifestation of disdain. It fell among the ropes of the belfry and remained. Pompey arose, and said no word. But he regarded me piteously with his large eyes and—sighed. Ye Gods—that sigh! It sunk into my heart. And the hair—the wool! Could I have reached that wool I would have bathed it with my tears, in testimony of regret. But alas! It was now far beyond my grasp. As it dangled among the cordage of the bell, I fancied it alive. I fancied that it stood on end with indignation. Thus the *happydandy Flos Aeris* of Java, bears, it is said, a beautiful flower, which will live when pulled up by the roots. The natives suspend it by a cord from the ceiling and enjoy its fragrance for years.

Our quarrel was now made up, and we looked about the room for an aperture through which to survey the city of Edina. Windows there were none. The sole light admitted into the gloomy chamber proceeded from a square opening, about a foot in diameter, at a height of about seven feet from the floor. Yet what will the energy of true genius not affect? I resolved to clamber up to this hole. A vast quantity of wheels, pinions, and other cabalistic-looking machinery stood opposite the hole, close to it; and through the hole there passed an

iron rod from the machinery. Between the wheels and the wall where the hole lay there was barely room for my body—yet I was desperate, and determined to persevere. I called Pompey to my side.

“You perceive that aperture, Pompey. I wish to look through it. You will stand here just beneath the hole—so. Now, hold out one of your hands, Pompey, and let me step upon it—thus. Now, the other hand, Pompey, and with its aid I will get upon your shoulders.”

He did every thing I wished, and I found, upon getting up, that I could easily pass my head and neck through the aperture. The prospect was sublime. Nothing could be more magnificent. I merely paused a moment to bid Diana behave herself, and assure Pompey that I would be considerate and bear as lightly as possible upon his shoulders. I told him I would be tender of his feelings—*ossi tender que beefsteak*. Having done this justice to my faithful friend, I gave myself up with great zest and enthusiasm to the enjoyment of the scene which so obligingly spread itself out before my eyes.

Upon this subject, however, I shall forbear to dilate. I will not describe the city of Edinburgh. Every one has been to the city of Edinburgh. Every one has been to Edinburgh—the classic Edina. I will confine myself to the momentous details of my own lamentable adventure. Having, in some measure, satisfied my curiosity in regard to the extent, situation, and general appearance of the city, I had leisure to survey the church in which I was, and the delicate architecture of the steeple. I observed that the aperture through which I had thrust my head was an opening in the dial-plate of a gigantic clock, and must have appeared, from the street, as a large key-hole, such as we see in the face of the French watches. No doubt the true object was to admit the arm of an attendant, to adjust, when necessary, the hands of the clock from within. I observed

also, with surprise, the immense size of these hands, the longest of which could not have been less than ten feet in length, and, where broadest, eight or nine inches in breadth. They were of solid steel apparently, and their edges appeared to be sharp. Having noticed these particulars, and some others, I again turned my eyes upon the glorious prospect below, and soon became absorbed in contemplation.

From this, after some minutes, I was aroused by the voice of Pompey, who declared that he could stand it no longer, and requested that I would be so kind as to come down. This was unreasonable, and I told him so in a speech of some length. He replied but with an evident misunderstanding of my ideas upon the subject. I accordingly grew angry, and told him in plain words, that he was a fool, that he had committed an *ignoramus e-clench-eye*, that his notions were mere *insommary Bovis*, and his words little better than *an enemywerrybor'em*. With this he appeared satisfied, and I resumed my contemplations.

It might have been half an hour after this altercation when, as I was deeply absorbed in the heavenly scenery beneath me, I was startled by something very cold which pressed with a gentle pressure on the back of my neck. It is needless to say that I felt inexpressibly alarmed. I knew that Pompey was beneath my feet, and that Diana was sitting, according to my explicit directions, upon her hind legs, in the farthest corner of the room. What could it be? Alas! I but too soon discovered. Turning my head gently to one side, I perceived, to my extreme horror, that the huge, glittering, scimitar-like minute-hand of the clock had, in the course of its hourly revolution, *descended upon my neck*. There was, I knew, not a second to be lost. I pulled back at once—but it was too late. There was no chance of forcing my head through the mouth of that terrible trap

in which it was so fairly caught, and which grew narrower and narrower with a rapidity too horrible to be conceived. The agony of that moment is not to be imagined. I threw up my hands and endeavored, with all my strength, to force upward the ponderous iron bar. I might as well have tried to lift the cathedral itself. Down, down, down it came, closer and yet closer. I screamed to Pompey for aid; but he said that I had hurt his feelings by calling him "an ignorant old squint-eye." I yelled to Diana; but she only said "bow-wow-wow," and that I had told her "on no account to stir from the corner." Thus I had no relief to expect from my associates.

Meantime the ponderous and terrific *Scythe of Time* (for I now discovered the literal import of that classical phrase) had not stopped, nor was it likely to stop, in its career. Down and still down, it came. It had already buried its sharp edge a full inch in my flesh, and my sensations grew indistinct and confused. At one time I fancied myself in Philadelphia with the stately Dr. Moneypenny, at another in the back parlor of Mr. Blackwood receiving his invaluable instructions. And then again the sweet recollection of better and earlier times came over me, and I thought of that happy period when the world was not all a desert, and Pompey not altogether cruel.

The ticking of the machinery amused me. *Amused me*, I say, for my sensations now bordered upon perfect happiness, and the most trifling circumstances afforded me pleasure. The eternal *click-clack, click-clack, click-clack* of the clock was the most melodious of music in my ears, and occasionally even put me in mind of the graceful sermonic harangues of Dr. Ollapod. Then there were the great figures upon the dial-plate—how intelligent, how intellectual, they all looked! And presently they took to dancing the Mazurka, and I

think it was the figure "V" who performed the most to my satisfaction. She was evidently a lady of breeding. None of your swaggerers, and nothing at all indelicate in her motions. She did the pirouette to admiration—whirling round upon her apex. I made an endeavor to hand her a chair, for I saw that she appeared fatigued with her exertions—and it was not until then that I fully perceived my lamentable situation. Lamentable indeed! The bar had buried itself two inches in my neck. I was aroused to a sense of exquisite pain. I prayed for death, and, in the agony of the moment, could not help repeating those exquisite verses of the poet Miguel De Cervantes:

*Vanny Buren, tan escondida
Query no te senty venny
Pork and pleasure, delly morry
Nommy, torny, darry, widdy!*

But now a new horror presented itself, and one indeed sufficient to startle the strongest nerves. My eyes, from the cruel pressure of the machine, were absolutely starting from their sockets. While I was thinking how I should possibly manage without them, one actually tumbled out of my head, and, rolling down the steep side of the steeple, lodged in the rain gutter which ran along the eaves of the main building. The loss of the eye was not so much as the insolent air of independence and contempt with which it regarded me after it was out. There it lay in the gutter just under my nose, and the airs it gave itself would have been ridiculous had they not been disgusting. Such winking and blinking were never before seen. This behavior on the part of my eye in the gutter was not only irritating on account of its manifest insolence and shameful ingratitude, but was also exceedingly inconvenient on account

of the sympathy which always exists between two eyes of the same head, however far apart. I was forced, in a manner, to wink and to blink, whether I would or not, in exact concert with the scoundrelly thing that lay just under my nose. I was presently relieved, however, by the dropping out of the other eye. In falling it took the same direction (possibly a concerted plot) as its fellow. Both rolled out of the gutter together, and in truth I was very glad to get rid of them.

The bar was now four inches and a half deep in my neck, and there was only a little bit of skin to cut through. My sensations were those of entire happiness, for I felt that in a few minutes, at farthest, I should be relieved from my disagreeable situation. And in this expectation I was not at all deceived. At twenty-five minutes past five in the afternoon, precisely, the huge minute-hand had proceeded sufficiently far on its terrible revolution to sever the small remainder of my neck. I was not sorry to see the head which had occasioned me so much embarrassment at length make a final separation from my body. It first rolled down the side of the steeple, then lodged, for a few seconds, in the gutter, and then made its way, with a plunge, into the middle of the street.

I will candidly confess that my feelings were now of the most singular—nay, of the most mysterious, the most perplexing and incomprehensible character. My senses were here and there at one and the same moment. With my head I imagined, at one time, that I the head, was the real Signora Psyche Zenobia—at another I felt convinced that myself, the body, was the proper identity. To clear my ideas on this topic I felt in my pocket for my snuff-box, but, upon getting it, and endeavoring to apply a pinch of its grateful contents in the ordinary manner, I became immediately aware of

my peculiar deficiency, and threw the box at once down to my head. It took a pinch with great satisfaction, and smiled me an acknowledgment in return. Shortly afterward it made me a speech, which I could hear but indistinctly without ears. I gathered enough, however, to know that it was astonished at my wish to remain alive under such circumstances. In the concluding sentences it quoted the noble words of Ariosto—

*Il pover hommy che non sera certy
And have a combat tenty erry morty;*

thus comparing me to the hero who, in the heat of the combat, not perceiving that he was dead, continued to contest the battle with inextinguishable valor. There was nothing now to prevent my getting down from my elevation, and I did so. What it was that Pompey saw so *very* peculiar in my appearance I have never yet been able to find out. The fellow opened his mouth from ear to ear and shut his two eyes as if he were endeavoring to crack nuts between the lids. Finally, throwing off his overcoat, he made one spring for the staircase and disappeared. I hurled after the scoundrel these vehement words of Demosthenes—

*Andrew O'Phlegethon, you really make haste to
fly.*

and then turned to the darling of my heart, to the one-eyed! the shaggy-haired Diana. Alas! what a horrible vision affronted my eyes? *Was* that a rat I saw skulking into his hole? *Are* these the picked bones of the little angel who has been cruelly devoured by the monster? Ye Gods! and what *do* I behold—is that the departed spirit, the shade, the ghost of my beloved puppy, which

I perceive sitting with a grace so melancholy, in the corner? Harken! for she speaks, and, heavens! it is in the German of Schiller—

*Unt stubby duk, so stubby dun
Duk shel duk shel*

Alas! and are not her words too true?

And if I died at least I died
For thee—for thee.

Sweet creature! she *too* has sacrificed herself in my behalf. Dogless, niggerless, headless, what *now* remains for the unhappy Signora Psyche Zenobia? Alas—*nothing!* I have done.

The narrator of this quiet horror story is as insane as Poe's Montresor. The climactic event apparently appeared in numerous guises in fiction of the last century, the most famous versions being a story by Frank Norris, author of "Octopus" and "McTeague," and the present Jack London tale.

MOON-FACE

BY JACK LONDON

John Claverhouse was a moon-faced man. You know the kind, cheekbones wide apart, chin and forehead melting into the cheeks to complete the perfect round, and the nose, broad and pudgy, equidistant from the circumference, flattened against the very center of the face like a dough ball upon the ceiling. Perhaps that is why I hated him, for truly he had become an offense to my eyes, and I believed the earth to be cumbered with his presence. Perhaps my mother may have been superstitious of the moon and looked upon it over the wrong shoulder at the wrong time.

Be that as it may, I hated John Claverhouse. Not that he had done me what society would consider a wrong or an ill turn. Far from it. The evil was of deeper, subtler sort, so elusive, so intangible, as to defy clear, definite analysis in words. We all experience such things at some period in our lives. For the first time we see a certain individual, one who the very instant before we did not dream existed; and yet, at the first moment of meeting, we say, "I do not like that man." Why do we not like him? Ah, we do not know why; we know only that we do not. We have taken a dislike, that is all. And so I with John Claverhouse.

What right had such a man to be happy? Yet he was an optimist. He was always gleeful and laughing. All things were always all right, curse him! Ah! How it

grated on my soul that he should be so happy! Other men could laugh, and it did not bother me. I even used to laugh myself, before I met John Claverhouse.

But his laugh! It irritated me, maddened me, as nothing else under the sun could irritate or madden me. It haunted me, gripped hold of me, and would not let me go. It was a huge, Gargantuan laugh. Waking or sleeping, it was always with me, whirring and jarring across my heartstrings like an enormous rasp. At break of day it came whooping across the fields to spoil my pleasant morning reverie. Under the aching noonday glare, when the green things drooped and the birds withdrew to the depths of the forest, and all nature drowsed, his great "Ha! Ha!" and "Ho! Ho!" rose up to the sky and challenged the sun. And at black midnight, from the lonely crossroads where he turned from town into his own place, came his plaguey cachinnations to rouse me from my sleep and make me writhe and clench my nails into my palms.

I went forth privily in the nighttime and turned his cattle into his fields, and in the morning heard his whooping laugh as he drove them out again. "It is nothing," he said; "the poor dumb beasties are not to be blamed for straying into fatter pastures."

He had a dog he called Mars, a big, splendid brute, part deerhound and part bloodhound, and resembling both. Mars was a great delight to him, and they were always together. But I bided my time and one day when opportunity was ripe lured the animal away and settled for him with strychnine and beefsteak. It made positively no impression on John Claverhouse. His laugh was as hearty and frequent as ever, and his face as much like the full moon as it always had been.

Then I set fire to his haystacks and his barn. But the next morning, being Sunday, he went forth blithe and cheerful.

"Where are you going?" I asked him as he went by the crossroads.

"Trout," he said, and his face beamed like a full moon. "I just dote on trout."

Was there ever such an impossible man! His whole harvest had gone up in his haystacks and barn. It was uninsured, I knew. And yet, in the face of famine and the rigorous winter, he went out gaily in quest of a mess of trout, forsooth, because he "doted" on them! Had gloom but rested, no matter how lightly, on his brow, or had his bovine countenance grown long and serious and less like the moon, or had he removed that smile but once from off his face, I am sure I could have forgiven him for existing. But no, he grew only more cheerful under misfortune.

I insulted him. He looked at me in slow and smiling surprise.

"I fight you? Why?" he asked slowly. And then he laughed. "You are so funny! Ho! Ho! You'll be the death of me! He! He! He! Oh! Ho! Ho! Ho!"

What would you? It was past endurance. By the blood of Judas, how I hated him. Then there was that name—Claverhouse! What a name! Wasn't it absurd? Claverhouse! Merciful heaven, *why* Claverhouse? Again and again I asked myself that question. I should not have minded Smith, or Brown, or Jones—but *Claverhouse!* I leave it to you. Repeat it to yourself—Claverhouse. Just listen to the ridiculous sound of it—Claverhouse! Should a man live with such a name? I ask you. "No," you say. And "no" said I.

But I bethought me of his mortgage. What of his crops and barn destroyed, I knew he would be unable to meet it. So I got a shrewd, closemouthed, tightfisted money lender to get the mortgage transferred to him. I did not appear, but through this agent I forced the foreclosure, and but few days (no more, believe me,

than the law allowed) were given John Claverhouse to remove his goods and chattels from the premises. Then I strolled down to see how he took it, for he had lived there upward of twenty years. But he met me with his saucer-eyes twinkling and the light glowing and spreading in his face till it was as a full-risen moon.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he laughed. "The funniest tyke, that youngster of mine! Did you ever hear the like? Let me tell you. He was down playing by the edge of the river when a piece of the bank caved in and splashed him. 'Oh, papa!' he cried, 'a great big puddle flew up and hit me.' "

He stopped and waited for me to join him in his infernal glee.

"I don't see any laugh in it," I said shortly, and I know my face went sour.

He regarded me with wonderment, and then came the damnable light, glowing and spreading, as I have described it, till his face shone soft and warm like the summer moon, and then the laugh—"Ha! Ha! That's funny! You don't see it, eh? He! He! Ho! Ho! Ho! He doesn't see it! Why, look here. You know a puddle—"

But I turned on my heel and left him. That was the last. I could stand it no longer. The thing must end right there, I thought, curse him. The earth should be quit of him. And as I went over the hill, I could hear his monstrous laugh reverberating against the sky.

Now, I pride myself on doing things neatly, and when I resolved to kill John Claverhouse I had it in mind to do so in such a fashion that I should not look back upon it and feel ashamed. I hate bungling, and I hate brutality. To me there is something repugnant in merely striking a man with one's naked fist—faugh! It is sickening! So, to shoot, or stab, or club John Claverhouse (oh, that name!) did not appeal to me. And not only was I impelled to do it neatly and artistically, but

also in such manner that not the slightest possible suspicion could be directed against me.

To this end I bent my intellect, and after a week of profound incubation, I hatched the scheme. Then I set to work. I bought a water-spaniel bitch, five months old, and devoted my whole attention to her training. Had anyone spied upon me, they would have remarked that this training consisted entirely of one thing—retrieving. I taught the dog, which I called Bellona, to fetch sticks I threw into the water, and not only to fetch, but to fetch at once, without mouthing or playing with them. The point was that she was to stop for nothing, but to deliver the stick in all haste. I made a practice of running away and leaving her to chase me, with the stick in her mouth, till she caught me. She was a bright animal and took to the game with such eagerness that I was soon content.

After that, at the first casual opportunity, I presented Bellona to John Claverhouse. I knew what I was about, for I was aware of a little weakness of his and of a little private sinning of which he was regularly and inveterately guilty.

“No,” he said when I placed the end of the rope in his hand. “No, you don’t mean it.” And his mouth opened wide and he grinned all over his damnable moon-face.

“I—I kind of thought, somehow, you didn’t like me,” he explained. “Wasn’t it funny for me to make such a mistake?” And at the thought he held his sides with laughter.

“What is her name?” he managed to ask between paroxysms.

“Bellona,” I said.

“He! He!” he tittered. “What a funny name!”

I gritted my teeth, for his mirth put them on edge,

and snapped out between them, "She was the wife of Mars, you know."

Then the light of the full moon began to suffuse his face, until he exploded with, "That was my other dog. Well, I guess she's a widow now. Oh! Ho! Ho! E! He! He! Ho!" he whooped after me, and I turned and fled swiftly over the hill.

The week passed by, and on Saturday evening I said to him, "You go away Monday, don't you?"

He nodded his head and grinned.

"Then you won't have another chance to get a mess of those trout you just dote on."

But he did not notice the sneer. "Oh, I don't know," he chuckled. "I'm going up tomorrow to try pretty hard."

Thus was assurance made doubly sure, and I went back to my house hugging myself with rapture.

Early next morning I saw him go by with a dipnet and gunnysack, and Bellona trotting at his heels. I knew where he was bound and cut out by the back pasture and climbed through the underbrush to the top of the mountain. Keeping carefully out of sight, I followed the crest along for a couple of miles to a natural amphitheater in the hills, where the little river raced down out of a gorge and stopped for breath in a large and placid rockbound pool. That was the spot! I sat down on the croup of the mountain, where I could see all that occurred, and lighted my pipe.

Ere many minutes had passed John Claverhouse came plodding up the bed of the stream. Bellona was ambling about him, and they were in high feather, her short snappy barks mingling with his deeper chest notes. Arrived at the pool, he threw down the dipnet and sack and drew from his hip pocket what looked like a large fat candle. But I knew it to be a stick of "giant," for such was his method of catching trout. He dyna-

mitted them. He attached the fuse by wrapping the "giant" tightly in a piece of cotton. Then he ignited the fuse and tossed the explosive into the pool.

Like a flash, Bellona was into the pool after it. I could have shrieked aloud for joy. Claverhouse yelled at her, but without avail. He pelted her with clods of rocks, but she swam steadily on till she got the stick of "giant" in her mouth, when she whirled about and headed for shore. Then, for the first time, he realized his danger and started to run. As foreseen and planned by me, she made the bank and took out after him. Oh, I tell you, it was great! As I have said, the pool lay in a sort of amphitheater. Above and below, the stream could be crossed on steppingstones. And around and around, up and down and across the stones, raced Claverhouse and Bellona. I could never have believed that such an ungainly man could run so fast. But run he did, Bellona hotfooted after him, and gaining. And then, just as she caught up, he in full stride and she leaping with nose at his knee, there was a sudden flash, a burst of smoke, a terrific detonation, and where man and dog had been the instant before there was naught to be seen but a big hole in the ground.

"Death from accident while engaged in illegal fishing." That was the verdict of the coroner's jury, and that is why I pride myself on the neat and artistic way in which I finished off John Claverhouse. There was no bungling, no brutality, nothing of which to be ashamed in the whole transaction, as I am sure you will agree. No more does his infernal laugh go echoing among the hills, and no more does his fat moon-face rise up to vex me. My days are peaceful now, and my night's sleep deep.

More years ago than I care to remember, Bill Kotzwinkle, Bob Shiarella, and I were fellow students at Penn State, but we hasten to point out that the following article? story? is solely a product of the authors' imaginations. Although there was one party . . .

Bill Kotzwinkle is the author of several critically acclaimed novels and stories, including "The Fan Man" and "Elephant Bangs Train." Bob Shiarella has written one of the filthiest, funniest novels in years, "Your Sparkle Cavalcade of Death," and it has my vote for the Satiric Gem of the Decade.

Now meet their Melmothian madman, Sebastian Trump. It is a sign of the times that a few years ago a major man's magazine reluctantly rejected the following as too shocking. How we've caught up!

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SEBASTIAN TRUMP *or* THE ART OF OUTRAGE

BY WILLIAM E. KOTZWINKLE AND
ROBERT SHIARELLA

Stepping from his townhouse, he paused to adjust the fit of his calfskin gloves. It was early evening; it was time. Flipping one end of his cape over his shoulder, he stepped lithely to the sidewalk. He walked--slim, delicate and dangerous--humming an obscure passage from Dargomijsky, tapping his cane lightly upon the cobblestones. His face carried no expression, save a crooked, lemon-twist smile.

A handsome woman approached through the semi-darkness, clasping the delicate hand of her angelic blue-eyed little girl. He ignored the woman, but paused briefly to bow to the child. Her azure eyes bulged like agates as she watched a hideous obscenity form on his sensitive mouth. The woman gasped.

He smiled and spake. "The first lesson of history, madam, is that evil is good. I quote from Emerson." So saying, he bowed and walked on. He heard the woman hiss through trembling lips:

"... outrageous, loathsome man!"

A delicious tingle cascaded through his body. Outrageous. With a hiss of exaltation, he struck out with his cane, but the hummingbird he aimed for had already backed out of the flower and flown away. No matter. The flower, the last from a widow's garden,

was soon impaled upon the tiny steel point of his cane. He plucked it off and inserted it in his button-hole.

Though it was evening for the world, Sebastian Trump had just begun his day. With his accustomed Style. Grace. Wit. With any kind of luck, he might be able to defile a nanny before the rising of the moon.

Does this brief passage stir your soul? Does it nibble on the dog-ends of your imagination? Does it ring an elusive chord in the darkest corners of your bowels, as if struck somehow by the blackest muse of Hell?

Of course it does.

Every man carries the dry seeds of bestiality within him. Each of us, however splendid our virtue, dreams once of being a splendid bastard, a sniggering swine, an *outrageous* ruin of time. It is an ancient memory of our race, cherished by all men, nourished by few.

Come. Let me water your Child's Garden of Contempt. Let me throw the Obscenities Ball, where the couples shall whirl, dream-like and delicate. The music will build, caress, climb to incredible crescendos. And then—You shall appear. The crowd will draw back. And beneath your goat's mask, you shall commit the many Outrages which have too long been festering within you.

Let me, Sebastian Trump, draw examples from my own life and show you how!

It is difficult to be truly Outrageous before the age of eighteen, which is to say, before one enters college, although occasionally one runs across the grammar school child (such as myself) who exposes himself at Mother's Tea, or tortures a little playmate, or, perhaps, ignites a beggar. Such occurrences have been recorded, but usually they are nipped in the first splendid bud and all pride and inventiveness are quickly stripped

from the promising youngster by civilization's watchdogs. Therefore, work in this area being so rare, we shall commence our little lecture with the conquering of the universities—known alternately as The College Outrage, or The Academic Atrocity.

ARRIVAL—PHASE ONE

"I begin to smell a rat." *Cervantes, Don Quixote.*

The way one arrives at college is of the utmost importance. Remember, this is to be your very first Outrage. You must choose your rhymes carefully. You are a freshman and you are, therefore, dirt. It is tradition. You, however, shall break tradition and emulate Sebastian Trump, arriving at college dressed as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

ARRIVAL—PHASE TWO

"Tom's no more, and so, no more of Tom." *Lord Byron.*

Very well. You have created a minor stir on the first day and people are uneasy in your presence. There are still barriers to surmount. The first of them is, of course, the life of your roommate. As a freshman, you will undoubtedly be assigned to a dormitory and you will have a roommate. This is clumsy, but is easily turned to good use. Remember—you are building a legend. Therefore, the first thing you must do upon entering college is to drive your roommate to suicide. Nothing could be more impressive, nothing could be easier. Observe:

"You had quite a dream last night, roomie."

"I did?"

"Yes, frightfully amusing. Kept calling me 'Mommy' and tried to crawl in bed with me. I suspect you'll get over it in time. I've written to your parents and your pastor for advice."

After your roommate has committed suicide, you, of course, embellish the event. Make it known that he took his life because of an unnatural love for you.

By now, you must begin wearing a black cloak and start collecting dark rocks. Take your meals in your room and rarely be seen in daylight. Carry a single shred of paper with you and read it over and over until it finally comes apart in your hands.

Then disappear for three days. When you return, discontinue the above, burn your bedsheets in the open air, act as if nothing has happened, and never mention your roommate's name again.

This should do nicely as a beginning at college.

THE SCANDAL SYNDROME

"Get thee to a nunnery, go." *Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1, line 142.*

Now you have truly begun. People are starting to avoid you. Stories have been circulated that you cast no shadow, or that cloven hoofprints were discovered in the snow beneath your window. You, of course, are the one who has initiated these stories. (If, however, when you pass, young women make the sign of the cross, you have overdone things a bit.)

You must surround yourself with scandal. This can be nothing so ordinary as getting some silly coed pregnant, although, of course, a few of these thrown in each

semester can do no harm. No, you must strive for the Higher Scandal, that which sets teeth on edge, and makes lesser men shout out with rage and fear in the night.

For instance, at some student-faculty function, you might walk up to the Dean of the Philosophy Department and ask him to dance, remarking something about "You and I being the only ones to truly appreciate the Greek culture." Before he has a chance to answer, sweep him into your arms and begin to reminisce tenderly about your father: "Yes, papa has existed for the last forty years on checks from the government. Interesting story, really. Happened in the Argonne Forest during World War One. He was shot in the gluteus maximus while bolting in the face of the enemy. Of course, father kept *that* fact to himself by shooting the only Allied witness to his unfortunate retreat, one Toby Whistler, a young British officer. My father carries with him to this day the last words of Toby Whistler, which were, I believe, 'A bit thick, Yank.' Well, I've got to run now. It's been delightful. Thanks for asking me." Whereupon you quickly fling yourself away from the Dean declaring in a loud voice that you wish to be released immediately. Retreat from the room backwards, fixing him with a frosty eye.

Major Outrages such as the above may be lent perspective if augmented by minor atrocities, such as sending your soiled laundry to an Oriental exchange student. With any sort of luck, you might create an international incident. ("The king has sent me some of his dirty linen to wash." *Voltaire. Reply to General Manstein.*)

Also, you might care to attempt the interesting little pastime of dressing up as a Cardinal and excommuni-

cating yourself in chapel on the Sunday of Homecoming Week.

While we are speaking of it, let us pass on to the crucially important subject of how to dress Outrageously.

THE OUTRAGEOUS UNIFORM

“How then was the devil dressed?” *Robert Southey, A Devil’s Walk, A Ballad, Stanza 3.*

The way you attire yourself must be both remarkable *and* thoroughly outlandish. You must always appear to be on the way to a duel, immaculate, contemptuous of custom, and ready to die. Vienna, at the turn of the century, is always suitable. Grey top hat, ruffled sleeves and collar, grey gloves and spats, the entire ensemble graced by an ebony cane, would do nicely. I found such an habit admirable, and was adjudged both mad and dangerous. To one constructing a legend of Outrage, nothing better suits one’s purposes.

THE OPPOSITE SEX

“I think this piece will help boil thy pot.” *Wolcot, The Bard Complimenteth Mr. West (c. 1790).*

Now we must concentrate upon the handling of women, in this case college coeds, and thus sub-designated The Cardigan Conquest. Needless to say, your behavior shall be loathsome, but the finer points must be discussed. Dialogue is of the utmost importance.

Example:

SHE: What do you plan to do when you leave college, Sebastian?

I: I'm thinking of becoming a professional rapist.

Example:

SHE: Do you mind my asking what your religion is, Sebastian?

I: Not at all. I am a Druid, my dear. Sacrificing virgins, that sort of thing. A dying practice.

Example:

SHE: Have you ever been in love, Sebastian?

I: Not since Mother died.

It is a well-known fact that women secretly dream of being Outraged, but the average man withdraws from the use of this knowledge. You, however, will feel quite free to heap endless humiliations and perversities upon them. For this bestial behavior, you shall be adored. In spite of themselves, they will dance the goat's dance with you, flinging themselves willingly, yea, desperately upon your Altar of Outrage.

SHE: Hello, Sebastian.

I: Let me touch it.

For dates, you will generally have women calling at your room for you. Always receive them in bed. A suitable remark might be, "Oh. You're early. You probably passed the Dean of Women on the staircase. Interesting lady. Wanted me to dress up as a chicken."

If you should call on your date, always arrive at least an hour late, giving some excuse such as "... couldn't tear myself away from the splendid sunset."

Next, you must take her where she has never been before and most certainly would never care to go.

Example:

"Some farmer boys I know are having a cock fight. I know you'll love it."

Throughout the evening, intimate that you are actually a woman. (NOTE: An excellent variation on this I

once employed was to lead a young woman to believe that I had been castrated while serving with the Peace Corps in Casablanca. She was consumed with curiosity, pathos, and desire.)

At this point, all that remains for you to do is to desert her in the middle of the evening.

Example:

If walking down the street together, wait until you come to an alley. Then, without a word, tear yourself from her arm and dart down the alleyway, an imprecation on your lips. Disappear into the shadows, your shoes tapping a faint but sinister progress through the bowels of the night. Utter a single maniacal laugh, but cut it off at its peak.

The next time you see her, you will, of course, act as if nothing has happened. Your name will soon be on every lip in every girls' dormitory in the school. We have only to observe the conversation which undoubtedly must take place when your date returns to her room that first night:

SHE: Well, first of all he took me to a cock fight . . .

OTHERS: (*gasping*) *A what?*

SHE: . . . and then he told me how he's actually a woman, but then some crazy doctor in Casablanca cut off . . . I mean . . . well, you know, *castrated* him, and . . .

OTHERS: Do you know for sure?!

SHE: . . . well, no . . . you see, he was too busy applauding the sunset, and then he hit a little girl with his cane . . . and then . . . well, he disappeared.

OTHERS: He *what?*

SHE: (*embarrassed and confused*) He . . . disappeared down an alley.

OTHERS: Oh, God, I hope he asks *me* out!

Touché!

An interesting little added touch in the handling of women (actually a confusion tactic) that I found most amusing was to go steady with a dwarf for a period of time, letting it be known that I was only dating her for her body.

DEPARTURE

“Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result.” *Winston Spencer Churchill, The Malakand Field Force (1898).*

Thus does one pass one's days at college. At the conclusion of one's academic career, one reflects how splendid a time it has been. One has trampled and ravaged. One has eaten all the flowers. There is, of course, but one stroke yet to be delivered—the last.

Sebastian Trump, Valedictorian.

Impossible? But Graduation Day finds you on the outdoor stage, waiting to be received. To those faculty members you have blackmailed, to those students you have compromised, to the army of innocents you have tricked, cajoled, and forced to do your work for you, it comes as no surprise.

You deliver a Major Oratory, filled with platitude and hypocrisy patterned on the Sermons of Joseph Butler. Then you step forward to receive the precious sheepskin. You smile and bow to the Dean of your college. Then you stride over to the President of the University. Standing directly before him, you proceed to tear up your diploma and fling it in his face. Then you walk to the edge of the platform and, standing above the draped banners of the school which bear the colors

of the institution, you urinate carefully upon them so the damp stain emblazons on the hallowed crest your name:

SEBASTIAN TRUMP

With arm raised in a final obscene gesture, your lips curled about a last vulgar, withering phrase, you stride contemptuously off the stage and into the sunset. You await the knife thrust in your back. It does not come. You have won.

You are ready to face life.

CAREER

"You have waked me too soon, I must slumber again." *Isaac Watts, The Sluggard, Stanza I.*

Now you are faced with a small unpleasantness. How can a man, so finely wrought, so highly strung, so delicately balanced—how can such a man be expected to join the ranks of the gainfully employed? It is so dreary, so stifling. Precisely. Therefore, you must join the ranks of the gracefully *unemployed*. The procedure is quite simple. You must find yourself a patroness.

TO-GRANDMOTHER'S-HOUSE-WE-GO- TRA-LA-LATERAL-OFFENSE

"Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em." *Augustus De Morgan, A Budget of Paradoxes.*

Situate yourself in the most fashionable bar in New York City. Cough frequently into your handkerchief. Tremble your glass. Faint briefly. Rave to yourself of unspeakable native rites. Call the bartender Abdul.

Wear a single black glove on your left hand. Do this daily until *she* comes into the bar and is seated at a table. Then walk slowly past, stumble, and fall into the chair beside her. Speak in a whisper: "Forgive me . . . Your Grace. The . . . fever."

"How pale and thin you look, young man." She sits before you, kind and wise and rich. She is fifty and covered with jewels. Your eyes glaze as you look at her. You mumble:

"You shouldn't come here, Your Grace! We . . . are . . . being watched. Don't turn! Just remain . . . perfectly still. The idol's eye is in the coachman's hat . . . placed it there . . . myself."

Then you leap to your feet.

"I'LL SAVE YOU, OLD MAN! . . . filthy devils! . . . I shall not die unaccompanied! Steady, Your Grace, steady now . . ."

"Waiter! Waiter! Help me! This poor man is ill!"

You touch her knee and smile boyishly. "It's mother's milk I miss," you say shyly.

"*Young man!*"

You rise, shaking in every joint. "Since my conversation . . . distresses you, madam, allow me to withdraw."

"Oh, no! No, please stay."

"As . . . you . . . wish."

Then you collapse to the floor.

This, at any rate, was the initial gambit of *my* first successful career exploit. I awoke in a marble tub. She stood over me, administering. Slowly, she nursed me back to health.

If it worked for Sebastian Trump, it will certainly work for you!

But then, you may correctly observe, the day will come—perhaps in a month, possibly in a year—when she will enter your wing of the house and ask *this* monstrous question:

"Sebastian, when do you think you might . . . begin looking for some sort . . . of work? I mean, what do you intend to do with your *life*?"

What then, Sebastian, I hear you demand, *what then?*

Ah, then it is time—to leave.

You look at her a long, quiet moment. "Very well. Sebastian will go away . . . and play with the Dark Women. *And the panda.*" Then, bowing quickly, you walk out of her life forever.

For you are Sebastian Trump. You are the Master Juggler, the Gypsy Prince, the Genie in Milady's teapot. You move on—leaving your glove in a face or two.

"Oh, yes, Trump. Deposed royalty, I think. Insolent as the devil. But they're all that way, I suppose."

"I saw Sebastian fighting a duel in the Governor's mansion. Cut off the butler's arm with a flaming shish kebob."

"Oh, I've devised many ways of killing him. I should rather like to rip out his throat with a band saw."

"Forgive me, father, I have erred. It was Sebastian."

"Saw Trump falling down drunk in the toy boat lake. Shouting something about swans dying in private."

"Have you read Sebastian's new book? *Famous Ladies I Have Mounted*. Positively incendiary, my dear! He's being sued for *billions!*"

"They say Trump was behind that revolution in Bombay!"

" . . . derailed the Prime Minister's train."

" . . . spent a year on Devil's Island. Made a brilliant escape."

"Forgive me, mother, I have erred. It was Sebastian."

"I'd never have expected the Queen Mother to be so indiscreet . . . especially with an American!"

" . . . denounced by the Vatican. But they were only returning the favor."

"The natives erected a statue to him. He's one of their gods now. They have some sort of virgin offering to him on his birthday."

" . . . of course, I wouldn't be against seeing him devoured by mad dogs, mind you."

"Forgive me, son, I have erred. It was Sebastian."

FINALE

"A chill snake lurks in the grass." *Vergil, Eclogues, II, 93.*

The world is your opponent. You parry, you thrust. You disappear. You tell the virgins, "Sebastian has no time. He never did." You are a rotting beautiful fruit. You are the dying Pan. You are the single greatest Bastard in the world, and the world is chasing you, intent upon cutting out your liver and frying up your jibs . . .

HERE THE MANUSCRIPT OF SEBASTIAN TRUMP ABRUPTLY ENDS. HAPPILY, CONTEMPORANEOUS REPORTAGE SUPPLIES THE FINAL EXAMPLE THAT THE AUTHOR WAS UNABLE TO FURNISH—THE EDITORS.

"Well, the bastard finally got it! Shot in the back with a crossbow. Happened in the Maidhead Castle. Trump was going out the window in a bit of a hurry. His Lordship had just enough time to get off a shot. Trump tumbled into the moat. Nasty drop."

"No, I *don't* regret having done Trump in! But I

shall never forget his last words. Oh, yes, he cried out just before he fell from the battlement. 'I have upset my applecart; I am done for! *Lucian, Pseudolus, 1-32!*' Then he fell. The man was mad as a hatter."

And so it ended. But Sebastian Trump's final words were reserved for the ears of Her Ladyship as she knelt beside the broken body.

"To live to be thirty, madam, is to have failed at life. I am quoting from H. H. Munro. And so, goodbye."

As His Lordship approached, she rose and fixed him with a steely eye, then spoke to him defiantly:

"I shall name the child Sebastian."

“Oil of Dog” is the basis for one of Theodore’s most famous tales, and anyone who has seen him perform it will never forget the experience. The original is scarcely less gruesome and yet is also revoltingly funny!

OIL OF DOG

BY AMBROSE BIERCE

My name is Boffer Bings. I was born of honest parents in one of the humbler walks of life, my father being a manufacturer of dog-oil and my mother having a small studio in the shadow of the village church, where she disposed of unwelcome babes. In my boyhood I was trained to habits of industry; I not only assisted my father in procuring dogs for his vats, but was frequently employed by my mother to carry away the debris of her work in the studio. In performance of this duty I sometimes had need of all my natural intelligence for all the law officers of the vicinity were opposed to my mother's business. They were not elected on an opposition ticket, and the matter had never been made a political issue; it just happened so. My father's business of making dog-oil was, naturally, less unpopular, though the owners of missing dogs sometimes regarded him with suspicion, which was reflected, to some extent, upon me. My father had, as silent partners, all the physicians of the town, who seldom wrote a prescription which did not contain what they were pleased to designate as *Ol. can.* It is really the most valuable medicine ever discovered. But most persons are unwilling to make personal sacrifices for the afflicted, and it was evident that many of the fattest dogs in town had been forbidden to play with me—a fact which pained my young sensibilities,

and at one time came near driving me to become a pirate.

Looking back upon those days, I cannot but regret, at times, that by indirectly bringing my beloved parents to their death I was the author of misfortunes profoundly affecting my future.

One evening while passing my father's oil factory with the body of a foundling from my mother's studio I saw a constable who seemed to be closely watching my movements. Young as I was, I had learned that constable's acts, of whatever apparent character, are prompted by the most reprehensible motives, and I avoided him by dodging into the oilery by a side door which happened to stand ajar. I locked it at once and was alone with my dead. My father had retired for the night. The only light in the place came from the furnace, which glowed a deep, rich crimson under one of the vats, casting ruddy reflections on the walls. Within the cauldron the oil still rolled in indolent ebullition, occasionally pushing to the surface a piece of dog. Seating myself to wait for the constable to go away, I held the naked body of the foundling in my lap and tenderly stroked its short, silken hair. Ah, how beautiful it was! Even at that early age I was passionately fond of children, and as I looked upon this cherub I could almost find it in my heart to wish that the small, red wound upon its breast—the work of my dear mother—had not been mortal.

It had been my custom to throw the babes into the river which nature had thoughtfully provided for the purpose, but that night I did not dare to leave the oilery for fear of the constable. "After all," I said to myself, "it cannot greatly matter if I put it into this cauldron. My father will never know the bones from those of a puppy, and the few deaths which may result from administering another kind of oil for the incom-

parable *Ol. can.* are not important in a population which increases so rapidly." In short, I took the first step in crime and brought myself untold sorrow by casting the babe into the cauldron.

The next day, somewhat to my surprise, my father, rubbing his hands with satisfaction, informed me and my mother that he had obtained the finest quality of oil that was ever seen; that the physicians to whom he had shown samples had so pronounced it. He added that he had no knowledge as to how the result was obtained; the dogs had been treated in all respects as usual, and were of ordinary breed. I deemed it my duty to explain—which I did, though palsied would have been my tongue if I could have foreseen the consequences. Bewailing their previous ignorance of the advantages of combining their industries, my parents at once took measures to repair the error. My mother removed her studio to a wing of the factory building and my duties in connection with the business ceased; I was no longer required to dispose of the bodies of the small superfluous, and there was no need of alluring dogs to their doom, for my father discarded them altogether, though they still had an honorable place in the name of the oil. So suddenly thrown into idleness, I might naturally have been expected to become vicious and dissolute, but I did not. The holy influence of my dear mother was ever about me to protect me from the temptations which beset youth, and my father was a deacon in a church. Alas, that through my fault these estimable persons should have come to so bad an end!

Finding a double profit in her business, my mother now devoted herself to it with new assiduity. She removed not only superfluous and unwelcome babes to order, but went out into the highways and byways, gathering in children of a larger growth, and even such adults as she could entice to the oilery. My father, too,

enamored of the superior quality of oil produced, purveyed for his vats with diligence and zeal. The conversion of their neighbors into dog-oil became, in short, the one passion of their lives—an absorbing and overwhelming greed took possession of their souls and served them in place of a hope in Heaven—by which, also, they were inspired.

So enterprising had they now become that a public meeting was held and resolutions passed severely censuring them. It was intimated by the chairman that any further raids upon the population would be met in a spirit of hostility. My poor parents left the meeting brokenhearted, desperate and, I believe, not altogether sane. Anyhow, I deemed it prudent not to enter the oilery with them that night, but slept outside in a stable.

At about midnight some mysterious impulse caused me to rise and peer through a window into the furnace-room, where I knew my father now slept. The fires were burning as brightly as if the following day's harvest had been expected to be abundant. One of the large cauldrons was slowly "walloping" with a mysterious appearance of self-restraint, as if it bided its time to put forth its full energy. My father was not in bed; he had risen in his nightclothes and was preparing a noose in a strong cord. From the looks which he cast at the door of my mother's bedroom I knew too well the purpose that he had in mind. Speechless and motionless with terror, I could do nothing in prevention or warning. Suddenly the door of my mother's apartment was opened, noiselessly, and the two confronted each other, both apparently surprised. The lady, also, was in her nightclothes, and she held in her right hand the tool of her trade, a long, narrow-bladed dagger.

She, too, had been unable to deny herself the last profit which the unfriendly action of the citizens and

my absence had left her. For one instant they looked into each other's blazing eyes and then sprang together with indescribable fury. Round and round the room they struggled, the man cursing, the woman shrieking, both fighting like demons—she to strike him with the dagger, he to strangle her with his great bare hands. I know not how long I had the unhappiness to observe this disagreeable instance of domestic infelicity, but at last, after a more than usually vigorous struggle, the combatants suddenly moved apart.

My father's breast and my mother's weapon showed evidences of contact. For another instant they glared at each other in the most unamiable way; then my poor, wounded father, feeling the hand of death upon him, leaped forward, unmindful of resistance, grasped my dear mother in his arms, dragged her to the side of the boiling cauldron, collected all his failing energies, and sprang in with her! In a moment, both had disappeared and were adding their oil to that of the committee of citizens who had called the day before with an invitation to the public meeting.

Convinced that these unhappy events closed to me every avenue to an honorable career in that town, I removed to the famous city of Otumwee, where these memoirs are written with a heart full of remorse for a heedless act entailing so dismal a commercial disaster.

THE DEMON OF THE GIBBET

BY FITZ-JAMES O'BRIEN

There was no west, there was no east,
No star abroad for eyes to see;
And Norman spurred his jaded beast
Hard by the terrible gallows-tree.

"O, Norman, haste across this waste,—
For something seems to follow me!"
"Cheer up, dear Maud, for, thanked be God,
We nigh have passed the gallows-tree!"

He kissed her lip: then—spur and whip!
And fast they fled across the lea.
But vain the heel, and rowel steel,—
For something leaped from the gallows-tree!

*"Give me your cloak, your knightly cloak,
That wrapped you oft beyond the sea!
The wind is bold, my bones are old,
And I am cold on the gallows-tree!"*

"O holy God! O dearest Maud,
Quick, quick, some prayers—the best that be!
A bony hand my neck has spanned,
And tears my knightly cloak from me!"

*"Give me your wine,—the red, red wine,
That in the flask hangs by your knee!*

*Ten summers burst on me accurst,
And I'm athirst on the gallows-tree!"*

"O Maud, my life, my loving wife!
Have you no prayer to set us free?
My belt unclasps,—a demon grasps,
And drags my wine-flask from my knee!"

*"Give me your bride, your bonnie bride,
That left her nest with you to flee!
O she hath flown to be my own,
For I'm alone on the gallows-tree!"*

"Cling closer, Maud, and trust in God!
Cling close!—Ah, heaven, she slips from me!"
A prayer, a groan, and he alone
Rode on that night from the gallows-tree.

Crumbling castles in the Black Forest, ruined nobles bent on nefarious doings, hideous entities, blood-stained manuscripts revealing terrible secrets—the stock-in-trade of the “Gothic thing” inherited from the Teutons and filtered through Walpole, Maturin, and Poe is an essential portion of the Theodorian cosmos. In “The Pale Criminal” we have a quintessential example of the genre, leavened by a soupçon of Freud. A forgotten little gem from “Weird Tales.”

An idea made this pale criminal pale. Adequate was he for the deed when he did it, but the idea of it, he could not endure when it was done.

Friedrich Nietzsche.

THE PALE CRIMINAL

BY C. HALL THOMPSON

I confess, in the beginning the case of Simon Conrad did not strike me as singular. On my first visit to the Castle von Zengerstein, I had no suspicion of the secret that lay hidden in the vaults of that Gothic pile that towered on a craggy hillcrest at the Black Forest's edge. I found Luther Markheim, master of Zengerstein, nothing more than a mountainous relic of the decadent line that spawned him; he and his companion, one Doctor Victor Rupert, were mildly concerned over the fate of Simon Conrad, but they feared they could be of little assistance since they had never even seen the gentleman in question. It was all very commonplace. No hint of the festering evil of Zengerstein seeped through the veneer of ordinariness.

But, events have taken a strange turn. The Conrad affair is no longer simply a missing persons case; it is a crime whose hideous memory still lurks in the mirror of the tarn that separates the Castle from the deserted village of Zengerstein. Perhaps, when you have come to know the facts of the case, you will say that I, Ludwig Koch, Inspektor of Police of the town of Donaueschingen, some twenty kilometres to the north,

should have guessed at the macabre truth. But, I am a simple man. My dealings in the world of crime had been with petty theft and trespassing. Never before had I been drawn into such a web of malignity as shrouded the house of Luther Markheim. I had heard men whisper, on a winter's night in the Hofbrau, of an evil that lingers in shadow, beyond the understanding of normal minds; once, on a visit to Baden, I had seen the Teufels Kanzel on the brink of the Schwarzwald, where, legend has it, the Devil preached to his disciples; to me, it seemed only an altar of scorched stone. The supernatural has always been beyond my ken. But, of late, I have undergone a change, Having witnessed the horror of Zengerstein, only an idiot could remain an unbeliever.

The entire truth of the affair has never been disclosed. For years, it has lain in the police archives, at Donaueschingen, buried in the rotting pages of the manuscript of Luther Markheim. Only recently it was decided that in view of work being done by one Sigmund Freud in a new field called psychiatry, it would be advisable to release the story of Zengerstein that these doctors might benefit by study of the quirks of a criminal mind in action. To outward appearances, the manuscript does not seem extraordinary; it was written in ink by a precise hand, the story is told with scientific clarity; and, except one turned to the last scrawled lines, except one examined the brownish stains on the final pages and knew them to be the marks of dried blood, one would never guess that these words were written by a man who had been blind for nearly a decade.

THE MARKHEIM MANUSCRIPT

There is so little time. Now, in the night, here in my bedchamber, I should feel safe. I should know that

there can be no truth in the unholy phantasms that have come to haunt my every waking moment. The doors are locked. Nothing could penetrate those ponderous panels. Nothing human. Yet, at every whimper of the wind in the grate, I start; the howling of the wolfhounds gnaws at my nerves. Rain sobs against the casement, lashed by the winds sweeping up from the River Murg. And throughout the stormy night, Koch and his deputies continue to wander the Black Forest, their lanterns bobbing like cat's-eyes in outer darkness. Still they search for Simon Conrad. Soon, perhaps, they shall return to Zengerstein to question me again. But, it is not Koch I fear. It is that thing no barred portal can ward off; that bloated livid face that floats somewhere in the well of the mirror by the bed; dark beings stir in the pit beyond that glass; and every moment, the scabrous visage grows nearer, the blind eyes burn more fiercely. Soon, it will rise from the crypts beneath the castle. I know. There is no escape. Soon, the time will have run out. And then, the slash of the scalpel, the pale face pressed close to mine—and death. The same death that monster brought to Simon Conrad short weeks ago.

It is incredible that things have come to this impasse. Every step of my plan was laid with such care. And, now, at the final moment, the whole structure crumbles beneath me. There can be but one answer. Somewhere, I have made a mistake; some thread of the web has tangled and snapped. Perhaps, if I retrace every step, there may yet be time for reparation. I must be exceedingly careful. I must not slip again. This is my last chance.

It began nine years ago, in Freiburg, in the winter of 189—. I was a different man, then. I was not a ponderous object of pity with a scarred face and sightless eyes; people then did not avoid me and turn to their friends

to whisper that a "has-been" always depressed them. In December of 189—, I was one of the most successful men in the city of the Hapsburgs. Mine was a place of honor at the banquet-tables of the Freiherren. My huge bulk then was the impressive figure of a man in the prime of life, well-dressed, imposing, a monument to the scientific genius it embodied; women marvelled at my delicate, sensitive hands—the hands of Herr Doktor Luther Markheim, one of the greatest surgeons in Germany. I was chief of staff at the Spital Hapsburg; the universities of Vienna had honored me with degrees for my work in surgical research. Countless students came to me, inspired, to study the art of the knife; it was among them that I discovered Victor Rupert.

He was not an idiot. An idiot could never have gained my confidence as he did. From the outset, it was obvious that his was the most promising talent in my select class at the Freiburg Universitat. His hands were slim and steady; he used the scalpel with the dexterity of a miniature-painter. No. There was nothing idiotic about Victor Rupert. But, he was a weakling and a fool. The only son of a burger who had made a fortune in ale and bestowed on himself a Baron's coronet, from his boyhood, Victor was a coddled child; on the death of his parents he came into a considerable estate, and continued where his mother and father left off—he coddled himself. Small, dark-skinned, with huge eyes, he affected florid waistcoats and the softest boots that money could buy. His time was divided between the Hofbrau barmaids, and the ladies of the chorus at the Theater Strauss. The evening invariably ended with some passing companions carrying Victor, dead drunk, to his quarters in the Freiburgstrasse, and departing with whatever money they could steal. A fool; a weakling whose brain had lost control of the flesh. I thought I could change him; I thought, in time, I could make

him a useful member of the profession. I should have known better. I should have cast him back into drunken oblivion where he belonged. I should have destroyed him, before he destroyed me.

I dare not dwell upon the details of the accident; for me, every moment of remembering is agony relived. The stench of chemical gas in the laboratory, the horrified look of realization on the face of the student named Lund, the roar of the explosion and hellfire eating into my flesh, slicing across my eyes, Lund's screams slowly dwindling, and at last, merciful darkness. You may find the known facts of the case in the files of any newspaper in Freiburg; they tell me the *Zeitung Leute* bore the headline:

PROMINENT SURGEON BLINDED,
STUDENT KILLED,
IN UNIVERSITY BLAST

It was called a freak accident; the truth never reached the public; no one ever knew that an hour before, I had seen Rupert conducting an experiment in that laboratory; no one ever guessed that the "accident" was caused by the negligence of a fool whose mind was still fogged by the burgundy he had swilled the night before.

Rupert was terrified. Exactly how, I have never learned—possibly by bribing the orderly—he gained my bedside before the authorities had questioned me. He clutched my sleeve; abject terror whined in every breath he drew.

"Before God, Herr Doktor, I'll do whatever you ask! I'll work for you, devote my life to serving you; give you all the money I have in this world. But, I beg of you . . . !" A sob broke his words. "On my knees, I beg you, do not tell them it was I . . ."

Anger seethed in the new, obscene darkness of my brain. My throat felt tight. I freed my arm of his quivering grasp.

"Snivelling swine!" I hissed. "Why? Tell me one reason why I should remain silent!" Laughter tore through my facial bandages. "The priceless fool! He destroys my sight; he ruins the career of a genius! And, then, he asks my protection!" The laugh shattered on a furious sob. My fingers closed over his wrist; the bones felt thin and brittle; I twisted. "Why? Tell me, Victor; Why?"

I felt his body wince; he whimpered.

"Nein, Herr Doktor! You must understand! They would imprison me! Throw me into a cell; leave me to rot! I . . . I could not endure it; I am a sensitive man . . ."

"Indeed!"

"Lieber Gott, have mercy, mein Herr!" The clammy wrist writhed in my grip. "I promise you! Whatever I have is yours; my money, my life! You must listen to me!"

And, in the end, I did.

Do not misunderstand. I did not forgive Rupert. How can you forgive the inane court-jester who has destroyed the Castle? No, I listened to Rupert because it was to my advantage to listen. Already, I had tasted the first bitter consequences of my blindness; a voice by my bed when they thought I was still unconscious: "Well, that finishes the great Markheim. A pity. But he was getting on in years . . . Perhaps it is as well to go out before your talent deteriorates . . ." This from a medical idiot unfit to be my laboratory assistant! Pity, old acquaintances uneasy in my blind fumbling presence, slow decay surrounded by mocking memories of what I had once been; that was the prospect of life should I remain in Freiburg. I had lived well; now

with only the pittance granted by the Spital Hapsburg, I would be buried alive in some dank areaway, three flights up, forgotten, alone. I knew I must escape. Victor Rupert offered the way out. His money would allow me to live comfortably and in seclusion; to hide the ruined tomb of genius that was my body in the solitude of the Castle von Zengerstein.

The Baronial title of Zengerstein was no tinsel honor bought by some grubby burger suddenly grown rich. As early as 1407 the coronet was bestowed upon one General Lothar von Zengerstein of the Army of Ferdinand, by the Emperor himself; the title carried with it certain lands, some miles south of Donaueschingen, bordering the Black Forest, and dominated by an ancient, brooding Schloss; under the guiding hand of Lothar, a shrewd businessman when not campaigning, the estate and the village that sprang up in the Castle's shadow rapidly became one of the most prosperous in the Lower Schwarzwald region. There was food and comfort for all; the bauer who paid allegiance to Lothar were content. The house of Zengerstein bore sons; like their fathers, they followed the military life; Zengersteinschloss rang with laughter of late revelry and wine. Such was the state of affairs when my grandfather, Bruno, Ninth Baron von Zengerstein, became head of the house.

Bruno was the father of two sons and a daughter, Lizavetta; Lizavetta von Zengerstein was my mother. My earliest recollections center about the mammoth halls of the Castle, where I was taken to live when my father, Paul Markheim, a medical student in Vienna, died of consumption shortly after my birth. I recall the towering figures of my grandfather and uncles grouped about the Teutonic hearth, drinking schnapps and laughing boisterously over the success of some past campaign, on the battlefield, or in the kitchen of the

Inn with the new barmaid. I was in a private school in Berlin when the Franco-Prussian war broke out; vague stirrings of it reached my sheltered world. Baron Bruno and his sons were among the first to reach the front; the younger son was killed by a musket-ball that shattered his brain; Karl, the eldest, died of typhoid in an obscure village in the Midi. Baron von Zengerstein returned a broken man.

The death of his sons destroyed all hope for fulfillment of his one desire; there would never be an heir to carry on the name of Zengerstein. He was an old man, his powers wasted in a profligate youth, and now, he entombed himself in the Castle to brood away the final hours of the last of the Zengersteins. Unwholesome legends surround the last days of Bruno von Zengerstein; it is said that in his mad desire to perpetuate his line, he consorted with the powers of darkness; the shelves of his private library were cluttered with volumes of forbidden lore; more than one village girl was terrorized by the cloaked figure that roamed the region of the Castle tarn during the night hours. The bauer grew uneasy; after sundown, they clung to their hearthfires behind locked cottage-doors. One by one, families packed their belongings and moved on, away from the Schwarzwald, where, if legend does not lie, the souls of Bruno's unborn heirs bayed like hounds to the baleful moon. The village was empty; thatched cottage rooves caved in and rats burrowed in the ruins. Zengerstein-schloss fell into disrepair; the priceless tapestries decayed; cobwebs coated the stone walls; cold grates bore charred relics of sacrifices made by the Baron von Zengerstein. The peasants who found his body and buried it in the Castle crypt say that the contorted dead face could only have been that of a madman. My mother was living, at that time, in Berlin; she did not go home for the last rites of the Baron. The strange stories

frightened her; once, she expressed the desire never to see Zengerstein again; her wish was granted. When she returned to the Castle, she lay in the sightless dark of her coffin. At the age of twenty-nine, I became legal heir to the Baronial lands of Zengerstein.

My homecoming fell far short of that of which I had so often dreamed. I had thought one day to return, triumphant; I had planned again and again the restoration of the State of Zengerstein. And now, at last, I would return; but the dreams were shattered. I rode to the Castle in the coach of a reluctant driver who feared the lonely road that wound through the hamlet to the gates of Zengerstein. I returned the blind relic of a genius who spoke to none save the companion he called Victor, to pass the lingering years alone and embittered. But, at least, I thought, I would find peace in oblivion.

I was wrong. For nine years I pursued the mocking shadow of contentment; nine years tortured by fantasies of what heights my career might have attained but for the weakness of Victor Rupert; nine years of festering blind ambition, during which one idea came to obsess me: I must see again! Together with Victor, I made an exhaustive study of blindness; night after night Victor read aloud from countless ancient volumes; his voice cracked; his eyes ached; I gave him no rest. Every bypath of science and sorcery, every chance of recovery, by miracle or surgery, we explored. And, slowly, in my mind, there began to formulate a rather terrifying theory; bit by bit, fragments of medical knowledge fell into place to weave the weird pattern. It was only a theory; I told myself to be detached, weigh every possibility. There was perhaps one chance in a million that the theory would succeed in practice. Failure might mean death. But, I knew I would take that chance, if only I had the materials with which to

A black and white photograph of a woman with long dark hair, smiling and looking towards the camera. She is holding a lit cigarette in her right hand. The photo is tilted and set against a yellow background.

C'mon

**Come for
the filter.**



**You'll stay
for the taste.**



19 mg. "tar," 1.2 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC Report Apr. '75.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

**I'd heard
enough to
make me
decide one
of two things:
quit or smoke True.**



I smoke True.

The low tar, low nicotine cigarette.
Think about it.



King Regular: 11 mg. "tar", 0.6 mg. nicotine,
King Menthol: 12 mg. "tar", 0.7 mg. nicotine, 100's
Regular: 13 mg. "tar", 0.7 mg. nicotine, 100's Menthol: 13 mg.
"tar", 0.8 mg. nicotine, av. per cigarette, FTC Report April '75.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

work—the forbidden human materials. That problem was solved the night Simon Conrad came to Zengerstein.

It is not strange that Conrad lost his way. That evening a bulwark of clouds swept southward along the River Murg; fog crawled through the deserted village-lanes, and settled like a caul over the tarn outside the gates of Zengerstein. The storm unleashed furiously in the dusk. Winds keened in the catacombs beneath the Castle. Rain lashed at the casements of the library until, with a nervous gesture, Victor closed the velvet portieres. In that storm, Simon Conrad did not have a chance. At best, the roads of the district are few and obscured by the lichen-fingers of the encroaching forest. A single footpath winds on into the flatlands that stretch toward Donaueschingen; but at a certain point in that lane, the traveler may easily go astray, and find himself lost in the byways of Zengerstein with none of whom to ask the way, no path to take but the rutted passage that climbs the hill to the gates of the Castle itself.

All day, Victor and I had been restless; never ideal companions, penned in too long by the storm, we could scarcely bear each other's presence. Victor haunted the wine-cabinet; I lost count of the times the decanter clinked against his glass. I ignored him; my mind busied itself with one thought; the possibilities of the success of my experiment. The library had been long silent, save for the whimpering of the storm.

Then, suddenly, after dark, the wolfhounds that guard the grounds of Zengerstein broke into a howl of attack. Breath hissed between Victor's lips; his light tread crossed the floor to the casement; the portieres were drawn aside. The howling grew louder.

"What is it?" I snapped. "Victor, what's the matter with those infernal beasts!"

"I can't see clearly . . ." Rupert's voice was strained. "There seems to be a light . . . out by the tarn . . . A man, carrying a lantern . . ."

"A man . . . ?" I strode to his side, caught his shoulder.

"Yes . . . My shoulder . . . you're hurting me . . . Please, there's no need to be frightened . . . The hounds will rout him . . ."

"Call them off," I cut in sharply.

"What?" Victor whined. "But the man may be a thief . . . a killer . . ."

"You heard me! I want that man unharmed! Call off the dogs!"

He obeyed.

I heard his cry to the animals; the angry baying died away. Victor was still uneasy but he did not question my next command; he ran through the downfall toward the steaming tarn. He was gone some time; he must have had difficulty helping the trespasser to shelter, for, though unharmed, the man who sank into the hearth-chair was badly shaken and terrified. His breath came in sobs; in his grip, the glass of brandy Victor had given him rattled against his teeth. A full five minutes passed before he had grown calm enough to speak, or understand what was said to him.

I flatter myself that I handled my first interview with Simon Conrad with consummate art; the circumstances were far from favorable, but, in the minutes that had lapsed since the first baying of the hounds a cunning assurance had laid hold on my mind. Winning Conrad over was ridiculously easy. Victor told me the man's right hand had been scratched by the fangs of Prinz; under my most solicitous directions, Simon Conrad's wound was cared for; he was supplied with dry clothes, steaming coffee, and an invitation to spend the night at Zengerstein. I apologized for the necessary precaution

of the dogs; with what craft I played upon his sympathies for the idiosyncracies of a blind recluse! As he sighed and sank back in his chair Simon Conrad brimmed with good-will and our best wine.

"Jawohl, Herr Doktor, this is quite an adventure I have had! Traveling alone in the Schwarzwald country is not the pastime for a timorous man, I fear . . ."

He laughed with inane good humor; I fancy my response was a trifle false. I was not in a mood for laughter. Alone! I thought. Then, he *is* alone! Excitement dried my throat. Every thread of the pattern fell so neatly into place!

I wearied of his chatter. I writhed under his gauche solicitude for my affliction.

"It must be a lonely world for you. Ja. Me, I do not know what I would do without my eyes. I am a jeweler by trade, you see; the firm of Krondorf in Munich. I have been fortunate, Gott sei dank! My sight has always been perfect . . ."

The mask of polite interest my guest saw gave no hint of the impatience that seethed in my brain. I thought the prattling fool would never be quiet; I thought he would never retire to the bedchamber Victor had prepared for him. But, he did.

"Schlafen Sie wohl, Herr Conrad," I called after him.

"Danke . . ."

Two sets of footsteps receded up the stone stairway. I poured myself a drink. Agitation destroyed my usually keen sense of direction; some of the wine spilled. I rose and paced before the hearth until Victor returned. I clutched his arm.

"His eyes!" I hissed. "What were they like, Victor?"

The fragile body drew away from me.

"I do not understand, Herr Doktor. What does all this solicitude for Conrad mean?" The old whine crept

into his tone. "You've acted most peculiarly, ever since he appeared . . . I . . ."

"The eyes!" I snapped. "The eyes, you idiot!"

"How should I know?" Petulantly, Victor freed his arm. "His eyes are like any others . . . a young man's eyes . . . keen and very blue. I don't see . . ."

I nodded. "Then, we need wait no longer . . ."

"Wait? I don't under . . ." The nasal voice withered; Victor swallowed audibly. "The experiment? You don't mean . . . No, you can't . . ."

"But, we can—we shall!"

"No!" It was a weak cry of cowardice. "I won't do it . . . It's insane . . . Anyway, it might only fail . . ."

"It can't fail," I said thickly. "I must see again!"

"I won't be involved in this hideous . . ."

"You will!" My fingers caught his lapel, crept upward, and closed on his throat. "You'll do as I say or spend the rest of your days rotting in prison. The authorities would still be interested to know who caused the accident at Freiburg, my dear Victor . . ." I thrust him from me. "Think it over," I said levelly. "Think, quickly."

I heard the raw sound of his breathing. His tread approached the wine-cabinet; there was the cold clink of bottle and glass. I smiled. After a long minute, Victor said in a soft, beaten voice:

"When?"

It was not easy. I had never done this sort of thing before. I had no grievance against Conrad; but it was his life or mine. If the experiment succeeded, the world would lose an insignificant jeweler, but regain a brilliant surgeon. Yes. It was difficult. But, anyone must admit, there was no other way. We waited until Conrad slept. I do not know how long Victor crouched by my side in the tower alcove scant feet from Conrad's chamber-door. Nocturnal rats skittered and squealed in the

shadows; in a lower corridor, the Swiss clock moaned the quarter hour. No sound issued from Conrad's room. With the stealth of a night animal, my hand reached for the latch.

"Quietly!" Victor whimpered. "He may still be awake . . ."

The latch clicked faintly; the door inched inward on a crack. A hinge whined; Victor's breath clogged in his throat. We stood quite still. With the sudden changefulness of a regional storm, the rain had abated shortly before midnight; now, the moon shimmered in a liquescent sky. Victor touched my arm.

"He's asleep . . ."

"Are you certain . . . ?"

"The moonlight falling across the bed. I can see his face . . ."

I listened more closely; the groan of a snore reached me. I nodded.

"All right," I said. "Now . . ."

It was done very quickly. We were beside the bed and Victor had pinned Conrad's arms to his sides. A gasp ripped from the sleeper's throat. He slept no longer. I felt his neck-muscles go taut beneath my searching grasp; I sensed his bulging eyes burning into my face. He managed one desperate, "Nein!" and then, deftly, the scalpel in my delicate fingers found the carotid artery. Conrad jolted; his throat gurgled; warm blood bathed my hand. I heard Victor moan at the sight of it. Briefly, Conrad struggled. Then, he stopped breathing. The body went rigid, then limp. My hands quivered. It took him longer to die than I had thought it would.

The worst was over. Simon Conrad was no longer a man; only a collection of bones and flesh and dying organisms; a guinea-pig, ripe for experimentation. The laboratory that led off the library had been long in prep-

aration for this moment; even when I had despaired of ever testing my theory, some inner sense of urgency had led me to have every instrument in readiness. The only thing I had to fear was the weakness of Victor Rupert; and, in this final instant, that fear was dispelled. For, like an actor, nervous until the rise of the curtain, but exquisitely self-assured once on stage, Victor had grown suddenly calm and detached; he was not a weakling, now. With the power of my will, the brilliance of my brain to direct his every move, he had become a precise surgical machine; his hands worked over Conrad's head as if they had been my own, responding to each order almost before it was spoken. The operation was a success; in less than an hour, two elliptical blue orbs floated in a jar of physiological saline beside the operating table.

By dawn, we had disposed of the body. The foetid vaults beneath the Castle were perfectly fitted to our needs. Simon Conrad lay in final rest amid the dust of the Barons von Zengerstein. As I climbed the dank stairway to my bed-chamber, a thrill of well-being mixed with expectation shot through my weary body. My deliverance was at hand. That day, I slept a more contented sleep than I had known in many years.

Not so with Victor. The tension of that moment of strange scientific achievement past, the weakling lapsed back into the tortured realm of doubt and cowardice. He could not have slept at all; in the evening, when I rose, I found him already in the library. His voice was discordant with strained nerves. He was pouring himself a drink. I went to his side.

"How many have you had?"

"I don't see what business that is of yours!" he snapped. "If I want to drink . . ."

He got no further; I smashed the glass from his fingers. It splintered on the floor.

"I told you to stay sober!"

"But, I need it! These trembling hands—I tell you I can't go through with this . . ."

"You must! We've been over the details a thousand times . . ."

"No . . ."

"You will, my dear Victor. Remember the authorities in Freiburg. And one other thing; you are now an accomplice in a premeditated murder . . ." Breath snagged in his throat; I seized his wrist. "I tell you, you *can* do it. Stop being a coward! Your hands are perfect; you worked wonderfully on Conrad last night . . ."

"But, you were there to back me up. If I made a mistake . . ."

"There will be no mistakes! Understand, Victor? You dare not make a mistake. You are the one who robbed me of my sight, and you are the one who will restore it!"

Despite my insistence, I was not at all certain it was wise to keep Victor from the liquor. Perhaps it would steady his nerves, work his mind to a pitch as coldly surgical as it had been when he worked on Conrad. That night, as I prepared myself for the final step in the experiment, misgiving seized my mind. Perhaps Victor was right; without my will to guide him, once I was under anesthesia, he might falter, he might make a mistake . . .

He stood washing his hands in disinfectant; when he spoke, his tone seemed calm enough. And yet . . . I sighed and shrugged. It was a chance, but it had to be risked. I lay back on the operating table; silent, sure. Victor was at my head. The mask brushed my cheek; the stench of ether swirled in my dark world. I breathed deeply. It did not take long. But, as I relinquished the last shred of consciousness, a needle of fear

stabbed my brain. Victor's fingers touched my forehead, and, it seemed to me, they trembled . . .

The return to consciousness was slow and painful. There was no sound; only the smell of antiseptic, and the tautness of bandages that swathed my head; the skin of my eyesockets ached and stung. My tongue felt thick in the arid hole of my mouth. Something rustled to the right of me.

"Victor . . . ?"

There was no answer; instruments rattled in a sterilizing basin. I pawed the air impatiently.

"Victor, where are you?"

"Here, Herr Doktor . . ." His voice was dry and tight. My groping fingers caught the edge of his tunic.

"Tell me," I croaked. "Quickly, you fool! It was a success? It went well . . . ?"

Victor cleared his throat; his tone turned evasive. "You should be quiet, now, Herr Doktor . . ."

I tightened my grip on his tunic; I drew his face down to mine. His whimpering breath was audible.

"Tell me!" I cried. "You haven't failed. You did not dare to fail! You succeeded! I *will* see again!"

"Yes! Yes! It's all right. I succeeded! Please . . . let me go . . ."

I did. I sank back against the pillows. Relief and weariness flooded my body; after a time, I slept. Once, during the night, I woke, to hear the spineless sound of a man sobbing. A bottle and glass clattered, neck-to-mouth. The fool was at it again. I did not interfere. Let him drown in his sotted forgetfulness. He had served his purpose. I was finished with him.

The weeks of convalescence were not as tedious as I had feared; during those last hours of interminable night, I was sustained by taut anticipation. I scoffed at Victor's uneasiness. Time and again, he sighed at my mocking laughter.

"You must not expect too much, Herr Doktor. We can't be certain . . ."

"Nonsense! You yourself said the operation was a success. I *shall* see! See with the young, perfect eyes of Simon Conrad!"

Victor's pessimism did not touch me. My mind was filled with plans for the resumption of my career; for the rebuilding of the life of the master surgeon, Herr Doktor Luther Markheim. I dreamed of the moment when I should watch the idiots who had supplanted me swallow their loathesome pity for a "blind has-been." My sense of security lasted until three days before the removal of the eye-bandages. Then, quite unexpectedly, a visitor came to Zengerstein.

By his tread and the timbre of his voice, he was a stolid man of perhaps forty-five. He spoke calmly and with respect; his tone was cultured, though with a faint inflection of the bauer. One would not have supposed him to be connected with the police. He said his name was Koch; Inspektor Koch, of the Donaueschingen constabulary. Almost imperceptibly, Victor drew a sharp breath. Only a blind man, with heightened aural sensitivity, could have caught the intensity of that tiny gasp.

"Well, Herr Inspektor," I said quietly. "And, what brings the police to Zengerstein . . . ?"

"The need of information," Koch said tonelessly. "We thought perhaps you could help, mein Herr . . ."

"Gladly, but I don't see . . ."

"Perhaps I'd best explain . . . You see, two weeks ago, a man named Conrad, a jeweler from Munich, set out from Donaueschingen on a walking-tour of the Schwarzwald region. His wife and several friends chose to stay behind and await his return. He never came back . . ." Koch cleared his throat.

"Victor," I put in. "Perhaps the Inspektor would care for a bit of burgundy . . ."

"Ja . . ." I heard Victor at the cabinet. He brought two glasses. He poured Koch's drink and began to fill my goblet.

"It is wondered," Koch continued, "if perhaps he lost his way . . . and happened onto Zengerstein . . ."

Victor's hand jolted; wine spilled over my fingers.

"Look what you're doing, you idiot!" At that instant, I could have killed him for his treacherous cowardice. I could only cover the slip as quickly as possible, and hope that Koch had not guessed its import.

"I'm afraid, Herr Inspektor, we can be of little assistance . . ." I shook my head, sipping burgundy. "You are the first visitor to Zengerstein in a good many years. No one could have come here without our knowledge. The dogs alone would have frightened him off . . ."

Koch sighed. "I see . . ."

"It is possible the poor devil lost his way in the Forest . . ."

"Ja . . ." The Inspektor rose slowly from his chair. "Ja, that is what we fear . . . Of course, my questioning you was only routine, mein Herr . . ."

"I quite understand." My tone was apologetic. "I should be only too happy to help, if I could . . ."

I did not like the moment of silence that followed; I sensed the shifting of Victor's feet beside my chair, as though he cringed under a steady scrutiny. I liked it even less when Inspektor Koch finally answered me in his flat voice:

"Perhaps you have already, Herr Doktor . . ."

He left; Victor saw him to the door. Sitting alone in the library, I clutched the goblet in both hands; it splintered; needles of pain gashed my palms, and I felt a wet warmth that might have been wine—or blood.

That night, in the quiet of my bed-chamber, Koch's double-edged words echoed malevolently. And I knew Victor must never make another such mistake as he had made this afternoon; he and the threat of his weakling nature must be wiped out.

This time it was easier. It may be that the second time is always easier. Against Simon Conrad I had harbored no grudge. But loathing for the spineless Victor had festered within me for nearly a decade. Now, he had become downright dangerous. Once again, his sotted stupidity threatened to ruin my life. Any scruples I had had in connection with Conrad's murder were entirely lacking as I planned that of Victor Rupert. My hands were steady; my voice calm. I was completely equal to the task that lay before me.

The acquisition of the poison was not difficult; every bottle in the laboratory was so arranged that I, in my blindness, could select from memory; my presence in the laboratory or at the wine-cabinet could hardly arouse Victor's suspicion. He had drunk a good deal during the day; the bottle I set on our table at dinner must have seemed as innocent as any other; the poison did not change the color of the wine. I ate little that night; I toyed with my food and waited. Finally, it came. He was setting down his glass when it slipped from numbed fingers. A gasp tore from his lungs.

"Doktor! . . . My throat! . . . that wine . . . burning in my chest . . . I . . ."

He broke off, struggling for breath; he must have seen the quiet smile that crossed my lips.

"Nein!" Victor lurched to his feet; his chair crashed backward; china shattered from the table to the stone floor. "Nein!" It was an agonized scream, now. "A mistake . . . don't let me die . . . you can't!" His clawed fingers caught at my robe; he whimpered like a dying cur. I thrust him from me; he fell against the cabinet-

de-vin; bottles and glasses clattered wildly. "You can't! You must save me . . . I lied . . . You vain fool, I lied . . . Don't you see? . . . If I die . . . If . . ." The words clotted in his seared mouth; a gurgling screech dwindled in the shadowed stillness of Zengerstein. Rupert crumpled in a silent heap.

He was not heavy, but the descent into the crypt seemed endless. Spider-webs brushed my face; a rat slithered across my feet and I stumbled, nearly dropping my hideous burden. The poison had worked quickly; droplets of still-warm blood oozed from Victor's scorched mouth; in the tomb itself a noisome stench choked my nostrils; without benefit of embalming, the remains of Simon Conrad had decomposed rapidly. I lay Victor on the shelf by the side of the maggot-eaten thing he had helped create. I was glad when it was over. I climbed wearily to my chamber and locked myself in. I should have been relieved; the last barrier to the safety of the new life that awaited me had been eliminated. Yet, strangely, I slept ill that night. The howling of the hounds was unbearable. They had been Victor's pets.

I thought the time would never come. The bandages itched intolerably; the waiting had done nothing for my nerves. Early this evening a fresh storm swept south along the River Murg. Demented winds chanted litanies in the depths of the Schwarzwald. I could hear the voices of men and the baying of hunting dogs, rising intermittently above the storm. Inspektor Koch and his deputies were unrelenting in their search for the man whose flesh slowly rotted in the vaults below Zengersteinschloss. I cursed Koch and his infernal curiosity. I soothed myself with the speculation that it was but a matter of hours, now; once I had removed the bandages, I could leave this damnable place, return to

Freiburg and the life in which I belonged. After to-night . . .

The laboratory seemed cold despite the fire in the grate. My hands were coated with sweat. The surgical scissors slipped several times in my trembling fingers. It *will* work, my mind chanted; it *must* work! I unwound the bandages carefully; cotton adhered to the healing flesh of my eyes. Then, the last strip of gauze fell away; an instant of darkness and my eyelids flickered. The blackness wavered and at its heart flared a tiny dancing object—the flaming moth of the gaslamp that stood before me! Lieber Gott, I could see!

I celebrated; my triumphant laughter violated the sullen dark Castle. I drank too much wine and ate too heartily. I toasted the impotent ghosts of Conrad and Victor and mocked their shadows that seemed to linger in the dim corners of the library. I was delirious with joy. And why not? Life sprawled before me anew in the wonderful colors of a world I had not seen for nearly a decade. Tomorrow, I would quit this house of the dead; tomorrow, I would set out for Freiburg. And, now, in this last night of farewell, I wandered the halls of Zengerstein, drinking in sights I had thought never to know again. The candelabra glinting in errant firelight, the tapestries alive with medieval pageantry, the Gothic arches of the upper corridors, and yes, the chamber that had been my mother's private sitting room—all before me now, just as I remembered them from childhood. Even the needlework my mother's hand had wrought remained as though she had left it there only last evening, incomplete, awaiting her return. How strange, I marvelled, that it has not altered in all these lonely years! How very strange! And, my own bedchamber, the same as ever, the canopied bed, the fencing foils and mask like skull and crossbones upon

the stone wall above the mantelpiece, and the full-length mirror by the bed . . . the mirror . . .

Perhaps it was the wine. But, as I paused before that mirror, peering into its watery crater, it seemed, for one awful instant, that I saw no reflection of myself. The glass had become a vast threshold on the lip of outer night, beyond which lay only steps going down—down to the bowels of earth, through the tombs of Zengerstein. And, as I watched, out of those catacombs rose a livid sphere of flesh, shapeless and twisted in a hideous grin. Instinctively, I drew away from that mask, and yet I could not shut from view the pallor of those flaccid jowls, the warped mouth, the hair, matted like reptiles on a scabrous skull. The dead-white skin was covered with raw cicatrices, as if some latent putrescence had seeped through the pores; and from scarred pits, sightless eyes glared at me. Breath rasped in my lungs. I reeled away from that hateful reflection, my mind screaming. No, no, it cannot be! And yet, I knew, beyond a doubt, the pale face that scowled from the glass was mine! Terror whirled in my brain; sobbing, I fell across the counterpane to sink almost immediately into a dreamless sleep—a stupor from which I woke—God knows how soon or late!—to find that blasphemous Thing of the mirror's depths bending over me!

It was not real; I lay riveted to the bed by some subconscious paralysis, and told myself it was a dream; an hallucination spawned by overwrought nerves and the macabre adventure through which I had gone in the past month. In reality, there could never exist a loathsome monster such as crowded its face close to mine in this horrible instant. Yet, even as I denied my sense of sight, a damp hand brushed my chest; fingers closed on my windpipe; the lips bared decayed teeth in a malevolent leer. The form lurched nearer and the free hand rose, very slowly. I stared, unbelieving, at the scalpel

grasped in those murderous fingers. And then, I knew. This was no childhood nightmare that would wither and die in sobs of waking relief. This was inescapable truth. I knew that in the maniacal visage that bent above my bed, I was seeing *myself*, the pale killer, as my victim had seen me in his moment of final agony; viewing the horror of my soul through the eyes of Simon Conrad, the man I had murdered!

I think I screamed, I tore free of the vise-like talons and crashed blindly to the floor. I stumbled to my feet, clutching the doorway for support. And then, I ran. Aimlessly, madly, I ran, winding through the labyrinthian ways of the Castle, whimpering like the fabled child lost in the Forest. I ran until my heart pounded in my ears, my breath jolted from exhausted lungs. In the end, I cowered in some niche in the upper darkness of Zengerstein, and waited.

It did not come. I waited like a beaten animal for death, and it did not come. The Thing of the mirror gave no pursuit. Behind me, the catacombs of corridor lay silent. Gradually, my sobbing quieted; my pulse slowed but remained erratic. Sweat bathed the seamed pallor of my face. Very slowly, I wound my way toward the flickering of the lamp that still burned in my bed-chamber; carefully—with what fearful gentleness!—I opened the door . . . Nothing. The room was empty. Plaintively, the storm begged entrance at the casements; outside, the hounds bayed. In the chamber itself, there was no sound save the mocking hiss of the gaslamp.

And it has been thus for the last three hours.

But, I am not fooled. I am still as clever as that Thing that lurks in the abyss of the mirror. I know the game it plays with me—a torturing game of cat-and-mouse. It has retreated, now; it would have me hope; it would have me believe it was all a dream, a trick of the

imagination. I am not so stupid. There are facts you cannot escape; there are scientific reports of the last image beheld by a dying man remaining indelible in the dead eyes; the last thing Simon Conrad saw was I, the glint of the scalpel in my hand; a murderer come to claim him. So, you see why I am not fooled; you see why I am afraid. The mirror is dark, now. But, in its inscrutable well, nameless evil stirs, and would come to life—the evil of murder and insanity that claimed Simon Conrad; the pallid horror that, sooner or later, shall rise again from the depths to claim . . .

Wait . . . the liquescence in the mirror shifts . . . the evil writhes like forming ecotoplasm . . . You see . . . I was not wrong . . . A rustling . . . the sounds made by the slow approach of ponderous death . . . a blur, now, in the glass . . . Yes! . . . That pale, fat face . . . nearer . . . Dear God . . . the eyes . . . the scarred blind eyes . . . and the scalpel . . . moving . . . upward . . . no . . .

I had come to the conclusion that the case of the disappearance of Simon Conrad was insoluble. I was wet and disgruntled; my men were glad the night was at an end. After hours of wandering the Schwarzwald region, fighting rain and treacherous marshes, we had unearthed nothing. Near dawn, the storm abated; the men returned, stoop-shouldered, to the Inn for dry clothes and warmed schnapps. For a long time, I stood irresolute on the Forest's edge, staring across the lands of Zengerstein to where the ivy-slimed Castle ramparts rose like barricades guarding some ancient secret. I hated the thought of returning to Conrad's wife and friends in Donaueschingen, unable to answer one of their anguished questions.

I am not certain what impulse took me across the village and round the steaming tarn to the gates of Zengerstein; perhaps, I merely wanted someone to talk to,

and the solitary light that still burned in an upper window of the Castle seemed inviting; or, perhaps, some inner uncertainty as to the position of Herr Doktor Markheim in this singular affair still nagged me. I do not know. But, of one thing I am certain. I did not expect the horrible discovery that awaited me.

The hounds that guarded the estate were chained; I had no difficulty gaining the Castle doors. But, there was no answer to the doleful summons of the knocker. The door was not locked. I called out for Markheim; I called for that strange little companion of his named Victor. Nothing. Only solemn reverberations of my own voice. And then, I went upstairs.

The light burning in that upper room sent slices of yellow through the portal crevices. I knocked. I tried to break in. In the end, I had to summon four of my men. Even then, the door gave way reluctantly. The bed-chamber was in a state of chaos. The mirror by the bed had been smashed to evilly smiling slivers, and before it sprawled the corpse of Luther Markheim, the slit in his throat torn wide, the scalpel still in his rigid fingers. A pool of his lifeblood made a scarlet halo about the swollen white mask of his face. On the writing table in one corner, gaslight wavered across the blood-spattered pages of the Markheim manuscript.

Herr Roderick, the coroner from Donaueschingen, is a small man with a cadaverous face and a reputation for being hardheaded and realistic; a man whose profession hovers constantly on the brink of death can hardly be otherwise. He listened to the story of Simon Conrad; he glanced through the manuscript of Luther Markheim and made a minute examination of the body. We followed the corpse down the clammy stairway. It was extremely heavy and took four men to carry it. Gingerly, the men arranged it in the hearse alongside the liquescent decadence that was the remains

of Conrad and Victor Rupert. The horses shied in the rain, as though conscious and fearful of the burden they drew slowly down the desolate hillside.

I stayed behind; there was still the routine investigation of the estate to be gotten through for the sake of my official report. Roderick sucked his tobacco-stained teeth, and followed me into the gloom of the library. He lit his pipe; a smoke cloud hovered between us, as if frozen in the chilled halflight. I sank into a chair and sat staring into the fireless grate. After a time, I sighed, and riffled the pages of the manuscript that lay in my lap.

"Strange case," I murmured. "Hideously strange . . ."

For a moment Roderick gazed at the tiny bonfire in his pipebowl. Then, quietly, he observed: "Even stranger than you think, my dear Koch . . ."

I looked at him askance; he went on slowly.

"Did you notice anything singular about Markheim's body, Inspektor?"

I shook my head.

"The eyes," Roderick said thoughtfully. "I examined the eyes very closely; there is scar-tissue about the sockets, as if an operation had been performed recently . . . But, the eyes in Markheim's head were brown . . . and the eyes of a man who had been blind for years!"

I could only stare.

"But, Markheim could *see*! He said he could see . . ."

Roderick moved his bony head from side to side.

"Not with those eyes, mein Herr. Nein. Luther Markheim never saw the Castle von Zengerstein; he only thought he saw it; willed himself to see it; what Markheim saw were the reflections of his own memories. The Thing that crept from the mirror, the monster that was himself seen through the eyes of Simon Conrad, existed only in Markheim's ego-warped mind.

It was an idea that pursued Markheim into the shadow-valley of madness; the guilty memory of the crime he committed. It was an idea that led him to destruction by the very hand that destroyed Conrad—the hand of Luther Markheim!”

“Still . . .” I frowned. “The manuscript. You read it. Rupert. . . .”

“Rupert!” Roderick interrupted. “Ja. There lies the key to the puzzle, mein freund. I read the manuscript, as you say. I read of Markheim’s own fear of Rupert’s cowardice; he knew that Rupert was a weakling. But, he didn’t guess that the weakling had a secret. A secret he was too terrified to disclose after the experiment; a secret he tried to scream out in his dying breath. The weakling, strong, as long as the will of Markheim upheld him, lost his strength as soon as that wavered under anesthetic. Victor Rupert began the transplantation of the eyes, but he never had the nerve to complete it!”

“Fantastic!” I rose abruptly. “My dear Roderick, you’ve read too much of this new fellow Freud. Why . . . it’s absurd. The will isn’t that powerful; it could never make a blind man believe he saw; not even a madman . . . Don’t be a fool . . .”

The coroner did not argue. He only shrugged and smiled at me through the haze of pipesmoke. His voice was quiet.

“Perhaps we’d better have a drink . . .”

We did; neither of us broached the matter again. After a time, he left and I began my inventory of the Castle.

I apologized to Roderick later that day. He was far from being a fool. My final investigation of the house of Zengerstein proved that. In the laboratory of Luther Markheim, on a metal stand near the operating table, I discovered a glass beaker filled with a saline solution of

some sort. In the crystal-clear liquid floated two elliptical, shining orbs. The irises seemed to stare up at me, clear and keen and very blue. They were the eyes of a man who smiled in ultimate triumph.

Remember the Day of the Jackal? Well, a mid-western governor has to work on a more modest budget . . .

Steve Knickmeyer, a newspaperman, critic, and mystery writer, makes his home in Ada, Oklahoma, and won't tell anyone why. His quietly slapstick tale of political skulduggery in low places would have delighted the late W. C. Fields.

THE DAY OF THE LYNX

BY STEVE KNICKMEYER

Governor Grift, the leading executive officer of the sovereign state of Oklahoma, sat erect in the leather chair positioned behind his enormous oak desk. The desk was cluttered with symbolic donkeys, campaign ballpoint pens, campaign nail files, campaign cards, various other paraphernalia—none of which dealt directly, or indirectly, for that matter, with his duties as Governor. There was a large, carefully framed snapshot of the Governor's wife and children: one wife and three children.

The photograph of Grift's mistress was concealed in a secret drawer.

Grift had polished off his paperwork earlier by the simple and expedient method of vetoing all the bills on his desk. After deep consideration, of course.

Grift heaved a mighty sigh. It was his politician's sigh: the one indicating he was laden with responsibilities. The effort Grift put into the sigh made the muscles in his neck creak slightly. He rotated his head in a left to right circle to alleviate the pressure (reminding himself the next circle must go from right to left), then sighed again, more cautiously, bunched his shoulders beneath his suit jacket and spoke.

"The man appears to be qualified, Boris, but can he be trusted?"

Boris cackled softly. Before Grift had taken him onto his staff as a token hunchback, Boris had had a tendency to cackle wildly, a not uncommon affliction among hunchbacks. But since Boris had risen in the world, he had domesticated his laugh. Though he still cackled (for it's difficult to master a new mode of expressing merriment after a lifetime of habit), he was now able to muffle its maniacal timbre most of the time.

"Yes," said Boris, nodding sagely, "the man may be trusted, Master."

The word was no sooner out of his mouth than the Governor hit his huge desk with his right fist, being careful not to bruise his hand (and reminding himself to use his left fist the next time). Once he had lost his temper during a meeting with Republicans and slugged the desk with his full strength. After the cast was removed, Grift vented his spleen more gently.

"Gosh darnit!" Grift exclaimed, "I've told you not to call me 'Master,' Boris! Are you determined to spoil my image?"

"No, Master," said Boris, still cackling quietly. "But we're alone, and it gives me pleasure. Where's the harm?"

Grift stared significantly at a brass donkey on his desk and said, "You, of all people, should realize a man in my prominent position is never truly alone."

Boris twitched his shoulders. It was his attempt to shrug, a gesture he'd been trying to master for years. But the hump disrupted his rhythm.

"Nobody plays the tapes but me," said the hunchback.

"And that's one person too many," said Grift, in what he considered an ominous tone.

Boris smiled ingratiatingly, revealing yellowed fangs.

"How else am I supposed to know what's going on?" he asked innocently.

"You could watch television and read the newspapers like the rest of my aides," grumbled Grift. He twitched his shoulders in unconscious imitation of the hunchback and asked, "Where were we?"

"I had just recited the man's qualifications," Boris replied primly.

"Ah, yes," said the Governor. "I think you've unearthed an excellent man, Boris. That business over in Arkansas, now, is particularly impressive."

Boris bowed his head in acknowledgement. He was proud, yet humble. "Very few people have the ability to direct the ricochet of a bullet," the hunchback commented.

"And to think it had to ricochet twice," said Grift, wagging his head in wonder. "Like a two-rail shot on a pool table. But, the question remains—can he be trusted?"

"Certainly," said Boris certainly. "The man is a paragon of integrity."

Grift rubbed his hands together, then peered at his palms in apparent amazement. After a minute had passed, Boris coughed politely and Grift looked up. "Ah, yes," he said, using his sincere politician's voice. "It appears I must believe in this man because I believe in you, Boris."

Boris twitched his shoulders, humbly.

Grift said, "We might as well—"

The ringing of the telephone interrupted him. Grift glared at the instrument. He was the Governor, by Gee, and he disliked the fact a telephone could preemptively summon him. Grift heaved his sigh of responsibility and lifted the receiver.

"It's the Attorney General," announced the diffident voice of the Governor's token blonde secretary.

"Right." Grift punched the hold button and told Boris: "It's him."

"Which him?" asked Boris, displaying the acumen that had raised him to the lofty position in state government he managed to maintain despite his physical handicap.

"Him," Grift said impatiently. "The A.G."

Boris climbed down from his chair and lost about six inches in height. "I'll start the tape, Master," he said. He left the room as Grift was saying:

"Darnit, Boris, I've *told* you not to call me that!"

Grift couldn't risk having the taping button near his desk, since the office was presumably open to the public and some farmer or Republican might wander in and accidentally discover the button. The tribulations of Citizen Nixon had made things tough for Governors. Everybody knew about tapes now.

Governor Grift was also hamstrung by finances. Oklahoma actually had a law demanding a balanced budget, and the Legislature would balk at appropriating money for the bugging of the Governor's office. Grift had to wring his funds for taping out of the grocery money, as it were. He couldn't afford one of the sophisticated, sound-activated recording devices, nor could he afford to let the tape run continuously: the amount of tape he could purchase was quite restricted.

One of Boris' main functions as Grift's top aide was to push the "record" button.

Grift spoke briefly with the A.G. about the appointment of a district judge. When the conversation ended and Boris had sufficient time to play back the recording, the hunchback returned to the Governor's office.

Grift was angry, but he refrained from punching his desk. "He's at it again," he told Boris. "Trying to pressure me."

Boris wiggled his eyebrows, a trick he had learned from Clapfoot the Clown, whom he watched on television during slack periods at the office. "He won't pressure you much longer," Boris promised Grift.

"Well, by Golly, I'm sure getting tired of it," the Governor muttered. "Bring in the assassin."

"Yes, Master," said Boris, salivating slightly.

The Lynx entered the room cautiously, as he entered all rooms. He surveyed the chamber with his oval eyes, saw no apparent threat, then frisked Grift and settled into a chair.

Grift was a little unsure how to begin. It was the first time he had dealt with an assassin. The Lynx watched him coldly with slate-grey eyes, waiting.

Finally Grift cleared his throat and said nervously: "Ah, pretty weather we're having."

The Lynx directed his eyes to a set of flowered curtains, through which came the sound of rain beating against the window. Then, still without speaking, he returned his gaze to Grift. The Lynx's eyes were not exactly slanted, but his upper lids folded at the outer eye-corners.

Grift coughed a bit and ignored the rain. He began again: "I've heard a lot about you."

The Lynx nodded sagely. He was a short, stubby man of about 45. His ears were tufted. They resembled triangles of hairy flesh rather than ears. The Lynx had tried to grow hair over his ears, but unfortunately, he was balding and found it difficult to grow enough hair to cover his head. To compensate, he let the hair in his ears grow untrammelled. This interfered with his hearing to a degree, and, in fact, simply accentuated his ears.

Grift tapped his fingernails nervously on the top of his desk with no discernible rhythm. The Lynx remained motionless save for his almost undetectable breathing.

"That was quite a job in Arkansas," Grift said, man to man, then, thinking the Lynx had perhaps done more than one job in Arkansas, he clarified: "The one where you had to ricochet the bullet to reach your target."

The Lynx spoke for the first time since entering the office. His voice was deep, smooth, and unhurried. "That *was* a difficult shot," he said casually, as if it were the type of thing he did every day. Why should *he* admit he had fired the rifle accidentally while aiming it at a nauseating picture of Snow White surrounded by her seven dwarfs?

Grift assumed the pose of a politician preparing to deal with a touchy subject, come heck or high water. "I have also been told," the Governor said authoritatively, "you need money."

The Lynx's casual shrug would have sent Boris into fits of envy. "Money buys things," he said impassively.

"Tell me about your last job," Grift ordered.

"The past is past and best forgotten," the Lynx said cryptically. "If I tell you about my last job, what's to keep me from telling my next employer about *this* job?"

Grift frowned. He was blessed with the politician's instinctive distrust of logic. He also despised honesty, but there were times when it was the only open route. "Darnit, I *know* about your last job," he told the Lynx, "I'm simply testing your veracity. If you refuse to answer, you may leave. The door's unlocked."

The Lynx abruptly stood upright, standing stiffly to minimize his lack of height, and strode to the door.

Grift watched with startled eyes. The Lynx locked the door and returned to his chair.

"Unlocked doors are unprofessional," he chided.

Grift flushed. The Lynx made a gesture of dismissal and resumed the interview. Grift experienced the not unfamiliar sensation of losing control of a situation.

"Now, is it the job in Missouri you want to know about?" asked the Lynx.

Grift shook his head impatiently. "You know which job I'm asking about," he told the Lynx.

"Hmmm." The Lynx cast a sheepish look at his shoes. "All right, I'll tell you—on the condition the information never leaves this room."

"Everything said in this room is confidential," the Governor proclaimed righteously.

"It was in a little dump called Chickasha," the Lynx said reluctantly. "A woman was having problems with, uh, with a German shepherd. The, uh, dog was turning over her trash and barking at night, keeping the woman awake. I shot the dog."

Grift made an undecipherable noise.

"It was a difficult shot," the Lynx added hurriedly. "Three hundred yards through a maze of garbage cans."

Grift nodded decisively. "Good," he said. "Now I'm sure we can do business. A hungry assassin is the best assassin. Do you know the Attorney General in this state?"

"By sight," said the Lynx. "He's on TV a lot campaigning against you."

Grift was discomfited momentarily. "That's not the only reason he's the target," he assured the Lynx. "He's getting way out of line on some matters concerning my personal life."

The Lynx shrugged once more. "I'm here to serve," he remarked stoically. "Motivations don't interest me."

The Governor clapped his hands sharply, then peered at his palms. The Lynx cocked an eyebrow at him.

"Let me show you the layout," Grift said briskly. He opened a desk drawer and removed a rolled-up chart. He tried to spread the chart over his desk, but the chart doggedly rolled back up. Finally Grift taped the four corners of the chart to his desk.

"Are you familiar with the Myriad?" asked Grift.

The Lynx shook his head. "Is it here in Oklahoma City?"

The Governor felt a twinge of disappointment. He'd thought everyone knew about the Myriad. "Yes, it's here. It was built to be a convention center, but so far it's been mostly a sports and entertainment arena."

"I can understand that," said the Lynx, deadpan.

Grift stared at the Lynx for a long moment, then continued: "We've got it all set up. All you have to do is fire the shot—but it's a long one. Clear across the arena."

The Lynx shrugged again. "No problem unless I've got a moving target."

Grift smiled. "He won't be moving. Now, the A.G. is going to a performance of *Disney on Parade* tomorrow night. He's taking a group of crippled children."

The Lynx shuddered involuntarily as visions of his own childhood tried to escape the bounds of repression. Ever since the incident with his sandbox, an incident he was loath to recall, the Lynx had detested children and everything associated with them.

"Anyway," said Grift, making an X on the chart, "he'll be sitting here."

The Lynx eyed the chart and nodded.

"You'll be here," Grift continued, making another X on the chart, on the far edge from the first X. "We've set up a conference room for you here. We installed a

sliding panel, and it opens right over the audience. There's a curtain separating the room from the arena, but it parts right at the panel. That's one of the reasons we chose the room. All clear, so far?"

"Sure. But how am I going to shoot him? I assume they'll douse the lights during the show, and he'll probably be getting the lousy cripples some sweets at the intermission."

"That's the beauty of it," Grift said proudly. "You are absolutely correct: the lights will be off during the performance. But," he paused dramatically, "there will be a spotlight on the A.G. during the show!"

"A spotlight?" the Lynx asked skeptically.

"Right." Grift was beaming. "They've got a cable running from backstage to the floor. And in the second act, after the intermission, Mary Poppins comes sliding down the cable. She's hooked onto it with her umbrella, and as she rides from about 60 feet in the air down to the floor the spotlight follows her all the way."

Grift made another X on the chart, close to the X that marked the Lynx's room. "The light comes from here," explained the Governor. "And besides spotting Mary Poppins the light continues on into the audience. We've checked it twice, and the A.G.'s seat was lit up like a press conference both times. You shoot when the spotlight hits him. You'll have a good five seconds. Mary Poppins descends slowly, and besides, the beam of light is much wider by the time it reaches the audience. All clear?"

The Lynx peered at the chart a moment, then nodded.

"That's all there is to it," Grift said. "I can foresee no difficulties with your escape. They won't know where the bullet came from, and there's always a crowd out in the halls, buying popcorn and programs and what not."

"How do I know which room's mine?" asked the Lynx.

Grift seemed a little embarrassed. "Well, crude as it may seem, we simply put an X by the doorknob. Nobody ever pays attention to those conference rooms when there's a concert or the like in progress."

"An X," mused the Lynx. "I suppose that's as good as anything. I'll bring a cold rifle and just leave it in the room."

"Cold?" asked Grift, confused.

"One that can't be traced," said the Lynx with patient professionalism.

"Oh, a *cold* rifle," said Grift. "Will you be able to get the weapon in without being spotted?"

"Sure. It breaks down. I'll assemble it in the room. Only problem is the barrel, and I'll stick that down my pants. It'll be as cold as a politician's heart, if you'll pardon the expression, but a person has to make some sacrifices, I suppose."

The Governor clapped his hands again. "That should cover it," he said. He tried to take the chart off his desk, but the tape refused to budge. He glared at it a moment, then ripped the chart off the desk, leaving the four corners still taped. The chart immediately rolled back up again. Grift shoved it back into the desk drawer, removed a packet of bills, and handed the money to the Lynx.

"Half now," Grift said. "After the job, the same man who contacted you before will bring you the other half. Same meeting arrangements as before. I wish you luck."

"It's not a matter of luck," the Lynx said coldly. He put the money in his pocket without counting it. Then he crossed the office to the door he had locked previously, snapped the latch, jerked the door open, and glared suspiciously up and down the hall.

The corridor was vacant, and the Lynx vanished without speaking again.

Grift sat back in his chair, chuckling, until Boris had time to listen to the tape. When he was finished, the hunchback entered the room through the door from the secretary's office.

"Well?" Grift asked his top aide, anxiously. "What do you think?"

"You handled it perfectly, Master." Grift frowned at him, but Boris continued: "Tomorrow the A.G. will be out of your hair, and your re-election will be assured. You haven't lost the speech, have you?"

"Of course not. It's a great speech, Boris. It will even bring tears to the eyes of Republicans."

Boris ducked his head humbly. "Oh, I wouldn't go that far."

"It's true," the Governor said firmly. "Uh, Boris—I have just one more favor to ask."

"Anything, Master."

"Well, the assassin says it's not a matter of luck, but this *is* a pretty chancy operation . . ."

"Oh, no," groaned Boris.

"So many things could go wrong," Grift wheedled. "Please?"

"Well, all right, then," Boris muttered sullenly. "But not for long."

"You're a *good* friend," said the Governor.

Then he rubbed Boris' hump for luck.

The Lynx arrived at the Myriad early in a stolen Cougar. He preferred to heist Jaguars for his jobs (all cats are not created equal), but he was afraid a Jag would be too conspicuous in the gravelly environs of Oklahoma City.

He drove into the underground parking area from the Reno Street entrance, paid the attendant, and followed the waving arms of uniformed children until he reached his parking slot. The Lynx was wearing furry gloves with leather pads on the tips of the fingers, so he wasn't worried about leaving fingerprints. He had cased the Myriad the previous night and noticed a plethora of taxicabs. The Cougar would remain underground, and the Lynx would exit via taxi.

The Lynx climbed out of the Cougar, adjusted the rifle barrel in his pants, and headed for the stairs. The barrel was cold, as expected, but the Lynx managed to walk in his natural, almost dainty, fashion.

He ascended the stairs to the main floor of the Myriad, then began moving up a concrete hill toward his conference room.

The Myriad swarmed with children. The Lynx peered about in distaste and walked close to the wall in an attempt to avoid contact with any of the excited youngsters who scampered around holding Disney character balloons, programs, and various gastronomical disasters.

Suddenly a tow-headed youth wearing Mickey Mouse ears and carrying a stick of cotton candy charged into the Lynx. The cotton candy smeared across the Lynx's groin. The Lynx scuttled back, snarling, and the rodent fetishist, frightened, detoured him and ran for momma.

The Lynx cursed and pawed at his pants. *Rotten, smelly kid*, he thought. He readjusted his felt hat, which he wore with the brim down to help conceal his ears, and continued his climb.

The noise level seemed to rise each minute. And the noise grated on the Lynx's nerves because it was tuned to the high pitch of children's voices.

Finally, with relief, the Lynx found the marked con-

ference room and escaped into its relative tranquility. He leaned against the wall a moment, panting, recuperating from the proximity of kids.

When he had regained his poise, the Lynx assembled his weapon, then tested the view through the sliding panel. The curtains parted perfectly, and he could see the crowd. He couldn't tell if the Attorney General had arrived yet, but his telescopic sight would rectify that.

The Lynx settled down to wait.

When the performance began, the Lynx opened the sliding panel and watched through the curtain. There was a huge screen above the stage and some sort of film was being shown. However, since the Lynx was sitting at a little less than a 180-degree angle from the screen, he couldn't make out what the film was, which was just as well. His room had been chosen for assassination, not for a good view of the show.

The Lynx didn't mind at all.

But then life-size Disney characters began to flood the stage. This was impossible to ignore. The Lynx spotted a few of the damned dwarfs from Snow White, and he saw Donald Duck. The irascible fowl was waddling arm in arm with Mickey Mouse, and both were grotesquely oversized; they looked as if they'd contracted animated elephantiasis.

The Lynx wondered what type of person it would take to don such ridiculous costumes and parade around a stage in front of other people. What kind of self-respect could they possibly have?

Just a herd of fart-faced fairies, he decided.

The first act went on and on. Besides having a poor angle of vision, the Lynx's conference room was out of range of the speakers, so he couldn't hear the commentary which accompanied the repulsive show.

For which, he was extremely glad. Watching was bad enough. It almost made him nauseous.

Pinocchio was the next character he recognized in the first act, but the Lynx couldn't decipher what the obnoxious brat with the growing nose was up to. He absently aimed his rifle at Pinocchio and grinned.

During the intermission, the Lynx closed the panel, but he could still hear the happy yipping of the children. It grated on his nerves.

They're actually enjoying this nonsense, the miserable little bastards!

When the second act began, the Lynx was ready. He brought his rifle to his shoulder and pointed it in the direction of the A.G.'s seat, which, according to Grift, would soon be bathed in light.

But where was Mary Poppins?

Instead of the intrepid nanny, Goofy was onstage with a Model T and a Volkswagen. The Lynx wondered what the hell the cars had to do with Disney. Goofy went from car to car, grinning idiotically, and the vehicles began doing odd things, such as opening up mouth-like hoods.

The Lynx was totally disgusted. How many sacrifices should one man be expected to make? He was almost prepared to renege on his contract.

The Volkswagen chased Goofy onto a high cable strung above the stage. The Lynx noted that when the spotlight was on the characters (if a VW could be considered a character), the beam did indeed extend into the audience on the other side of the arena.

He readied his rifle once more.

Suddenly, the orchestra began playing so loudly that even from his retreat, the Lynx could faintly hear the bouncy strains of "A Spoonful of Sugar." Mary Poppins finally was making her entrance. Dangling from her umbrella, which was hooked onto the cable, she began a slow descent. The children in the audience, and even some adults (the Lynx noticed in amazement),

were whooping and cheering and clapping their hands in delight. The Lynx nearly choked with revulsion.

Mary Poppins reminded the Lynx vaguely of his mother.

His rifle followed the beam from the spotlight. Then he recognized the A.G., sitting with a group of crippled children, his arm around one of them. The Governor was right: the A.G. was clearly visible. It would be a simple shot.

The Lynx glared at Mary Poppins, coasting down the cable to join the other morons on the stage. Through the telescopic sight, he got a good look at her legs beneath the billowing costume. They weren't bad.

The A.G. was well into the light now.

The Lynx took careful aim, grinning, relaxed, and gently squeezed the trigger.

The music drowned out the children's screams. The A.G. lurched forward, shock contorting his features, knocking down the crippled child he'd had his arm around. Nearby, in the arena, some blood spattered on Donald Duck's bill. The Lynx crept out of the Myriad, bearing a beatific smile.

Grift and Boris waited apprehensively in the Governor's office. It was impossible to talk shop when their minds were preoccupied with a single thought, so they sat in silence. Grift was in the chair behind his desk, absently scraping at the adhesive still stuck on its surface. Boris sat in the chair the Lynx had used.

The Governor and his hunchback waited in silence.

Waited.

And waited.

The telephone rang.

For once, Grift was happy to answer its summons. He lifted the receiver and listened to the report. Boris watched him with anxious eyes.

Abruptly, the Governor turned quite pale. He held the phone for a moment longer, then cradled the receiver, very gently. Boris peered at him nervously, but Grift remained silent for a long time.

"Well?" asked the hunchback at last.

"My God," Grift said, almost reverently. "He shot Mary Poppins."

"What!"

"While she was coming down the cable, while she was in the spotlight—he shot Mary Poppins." The Governor sagged in his chair.

After a moment, Boris began to cackle wildly.

Grift glared at him. "What's so amusing?" he demanded.

Boris struggled to speak. "I've always hated Mary Poppins!" he finally managed to say between cackles, "*and* her damned umbrella, too!"

Grift smashed his fist into his desk, and immediately yowled with pain. Then he told Boris: "That's it! You're fired!"

"You can't fire me," Boris sneered. "I've heard all the tapes."

Grift sighed profoundly. "I didn't really mean it, Boris," he said apologetically. "You'll have to excuse me, but it's just that I'm a little upset at the moment."

Boris finally brought his cackling under control. "Do you think we could get a refund, Master?" he asked.

Grift shook his head sadly. Then he brightened a bit. "At least we only paid him half," said the Governor.

The hunchback and the Governor stared at one another for a long moment. Their eyes filled with dedication.

Eventually Grift said calmly: "We'll simply have to find another assassin."

Boris nodded. "Save the speech."

Here is an outrageous drollery that takes the revenant theme of ghostly fiction and nearly kids it to life. Joseph Lavinson writes, "The tale resulted from a nightmare that followed the death of a friend who was a singer of great renown. I do not know why such a melancholy experience should have resulted in the bizarre tale that flowed from my pen. Even more disturbing to a supposedly liberal male are the elements of suppressed chauvinism that comprise an essential portion of the story's fabric . . ."

OUR LATE VISITOR

BY JOSEPH LAVINSON

Hearing an ascending tread upon the stairs leading to my workroom door, I peered out and saw Albert mounting the steps. I confess my first thoughts were completely selfish: *How the devil did he find us out here in the middle of the woods?*—and then, since he is often garrulous, *Now I shall never finish writing my chapter tonight!* But then my natural hospitality surfaced, and my conscience smote me fiercely for wishing away my closest friend. I resolutely set aside my petty problems—for, after all, I recollected, what were they compared to *his*, considering that he had died the previous week?

Of course, Jan and I only had the news second-hand, and we never put much faith in the *Times*. According to the obituary, rites were held in Albert's ancestral New England home, while a memorial ceremony was conducted in the city. But my own precarious health forbade me from attending it.

As he crossed the threshold of my den, I greeted Albert heartily and complimented him on the ruddiness of his complexion. He really looked the picture of health, and this made me something doubt the reliability of the newspaper accounts of his dissolution. I settled him in my easy chair, put a bottle of Majorska on the table by his side, and heartily pumped his cold hand. Despite the inconvenience of his visit (it was well past mid-

night), I was really quite pleased to see him, the more I thought of it. For several days, my spirits had been at their lowest ebb, and Albert's infectious *joie de vivre* seemed the fittest prescription for exorcising my *acedia*.

For several minutes, we exchanged hearty banalities. Naturally I was curious to learn the details of his interment, but I shrank from broaching the subject. I could not be sure whether it was proper etiquette to discuss so personal a topic, and besides, it was far too lugubrious when gaiety was what I craved!

We had scarce emptied the fifth when a sharp rap from the floor beneath quelled our festivities. Albert's voice is a big one that makes walls quake and furniture tremble. I feared its deep timbre had penetrated to the nursery below. Excusing myself, I descended the stairs and found Jan in our child's room, singing her back to sleep.

"You woke her!" she accused me, and I sheepishly explained that Albert had paid an unexpected call.

"How *dare* he?" she demanded. "He's supposed to be dead!"

"Hush! He'll hear you!"

"I don't care if he does. What right has he to intrude at this time of night and disturb the entire house? *Is he dead or not?*"

"Please," I implored, trying to quell her ire with a gesture, "what does it matter? After all, he *is* our friend!"

"He's your friend, not mine," Jan objected. "If he is *not* dead, it's too late for a social visit, and if he *is*, then he certainly has no business here! Hasn't he any sense of propriety?"

I did what I could to calm her, but to no avail. Her tenacity resembles nothing so much as a decapitated gila monster whose severed head still clings to the victim it has bitten. She positively insisted that I return to

the attic and determine the precise state of Albert's health. I was reluctant to insult my guest, and told her so, but Jan would not be gainsaid.

"And while you're talking to him," she added, "see that he keeps quiet and doesn't waken Elania again. I had to sing her back to sleep, and you know how I hate music!"

"But isn't her musical turtle working?" I asked.

"No. It's broken! And it's not a turtle, as you know very well! It's a beetle—no matter *what* you tell Elania!"

The turtle was a long-standing toy of contention between Jan and me. It *was*, of course, a stuffed beetle with a music-box inside, but I detest crawling things, so I divested it of a few of its cloth legs and christened it "turtle," with which nomenclature our daughter heartily concurred.

"What harm is it," I repeatedly asked, "if Elania thinks of it as a turtle?"

"*Because*," Jan insisted, "*it is a beetle! A beetle is a beetle and a turtle is a turtle!*"

I have often tried to reason with my wife. I have said again and again that if we *think* something is so, then it *is*, and have referred her to Pirandello for confirmation of my argument. But Jan's frame of reality is unshakably objective, and no internalization upon the mystery of things touches her. *I am*, she would have it, *therefore I think*.

I returned to the attic, and found Albert puffing on his clay pipe. A second fifth of vodka, half depleted, was at his elbow, and a merry smile played upon his thick lips.

"And now," he proclaimed as soon as I had shut the door, "I do believe it is time for a song!"

In vain, I tried to suppress his urge to carol forth, but I might as soon have harnessed the whirlwind. He

has a well-trained voice. Once he carried spears at the Met, but in his maturer days, had graduated to the enviable role of torturer in "Samson and Delilah" and frequently had the privilege of burning out the strongman's eyes. Thus my friend was amply qualified to break into the refrain of "La Calunnia" at three o'clock in the morning. My half-hearted protests forgotten, I sat at my work-table and listened, entranced.

He had scarce gotten halfway through the coda when a loud double-rap at the door of my den stopped him smack upon the final repetition of the word "flagello."

I had no opportunity to bid the knocker enter. Before the words could clear the roof of my mouth, the door slammed wide open and Jan strode in, fury in her eyes.

Albert rose and respectfully bowed to her. Then he drank her health and swallowed the rest of the vodka in his glass.

"I asked you to quiet him down!" she barked at me, then rounded on my friend. "And *you*!! What right have you to be here at this time of morning? Don't you know this is the only chance my husband has to work undisturbed?"

"I beg your pardon," Albert murmured, taking her hand in his and pressing her fingers to his lips, "but I so wished to see you all once more, and there simply was no opportunity to consider the niceties of timing."

She snatched back her hand, scarcely mollified. "That's the way you always *were*, Albert!" she accused. "My husband's welfare never concerned you, it's always been your convenience that has determined the scope of friendship—"

"Jan!" I pleaded, "You're insulting our guest!"

"I don't care, it's true! You're only an article of furniture to him. Whenever he wants to relax, he puts his feet up on you."

The situation was clearly impossible, and I turned to Albert with a shrug. My lips were sealed, but he knew what my pantomime meant right enough: "*We know what women are!*"

"Well, well," said Albert, walking to the door, "it is clear to me I have not timed my visit as conveniently as I might have, and so, I will say goodnight." He bowed, and turned to depart, but Jan, crossing her arms, fixed him with a stare.

"Not so fast, Albert!" she snapped. "You are *not* leaving until you answer one question!"

"Janice!" I begged, "Albert has come such a long way to visit us. Is it necessary to be so rude as—" but I got no further. She turned her baleful stare upon me, and my heart sank in a morass of cowardice.

"Well?" she asked in a threatening voice, glowering at me. Her foot tapped impatiently. "Will *you* ask him, or shall I?"

I forestalled her with a resigned gesture, and turned to Albert. His pudgy face wore his customary good-humored grin, and he spread his hands apart in a gesture of amused bewilderment.

"What can you possibly ask," he inquired, "that would offend me? Despite what this good woman says, you are my dearest friend, and I willingly open the secrets of my heart to your inspection. 'Speak, demand, I'll answer.' "

His words cheered me. After all, what wrong *could* my curiosity commit? It was neither a subject of embarrassment nor shame. I cleared my throat and resolved to hesitate no longer.

"Albert, *mon vieux*," I said, smiling to prove that the matter was really of trifling consequence, "the fact is that Janice and I read some disturbing news in last Tuesday's *Times* . . ."

I paused, expecting him to catch my meaning. But

he merely stared at me with a blank expression on his face.

"I am at a complete loss," he said at last, "to discover to what you allude. I do not recall any distressing articles in last week's papers—but perhaps you were not aware that I subscribe to the *Post*?"

"Well, then you see," I replied, flustered, "the *Times* . . . you know . . . that is . . . the fact is . . ." The words stuck in my throat, but Jan, grown weary of my dila-tory approach, blurted out what I had tried to gently insinuate.

"*The newspaper*," she told Albert, "*positively stated you were dead.*"

He stared at her amazed. Then he looked at me, and I cannot adequately describe the anguished expression that filled his eyes. Sorrow was the principal emotion, and pain, too. Yet there was something worse—a keen disappointment that exceeded the normal bounds of that mundane humor. All of Albert's inextinguishable zest for life had been suddenly, impossibly, but irrevocably quelled.

"I wish," he moaned in a daunted, mournful voice such as I have never heard him use before, "I wish most mightily that you *had never told me!*" And even as he spoke, the arch of his balding scalp caved in-wards and his round skull turned into a hollow concav-ity. The lights within his eyes guttered and died, and the smile upon his lips flickered like a death's-head grin before the *labia* sucked in and disappeared. His arms and legs and trunk deflated, collapsed, as if they had been filled with Jello subjected to a bath of scalding water.

Where my friend had stood, there was nothing but a damp stain which oozed out of one of my daughter's oldest, most cruelly ravaged rag dolls that lay crumpled on the floor. Its face, half-obliterated by the devouring

tooth of Time, soaked up the spreading liquid that poured from its body. I knelt beside the pool and, upon tasting it, identified it as Majorska vodka.

"For once," said Jan as she stripped off her nightdress and clambered into bed an hour later, "it appears as if the *Times* got its facts straight."

"Yes," I murmured sullenly, "but why did *we* have to bring it to his attention?"

"After all," she said, lightly caressing my cheek with her fingertips, "he *had* to be told, sooner or later. Would you rather he'd heard it from a stranger instead of from his closest friends?"

I tried to argue about the necessity of telling him *at all*, but I could not make her see my point. Besides, her hands were busy beneath the covers, and soon I found myself preoccupied with other, more immediate concerns.

But before Janice permitted me to finish the business at hand, I had to promise her to tell Elania that her turtle was really a beetle.

Maurice Level was one of the great writers of the French theater of pain and cruelty, the Grand Guignol, and his horror tales are unjustly obscure today. Except for two English magazine appearances more than thirty years apart, "Night and Silence" has remained one of Level's least-known stories. Yet it is one of his greatest works, a mood piece whose mundane terrors are somehow raised to near-cosmic proportions.

NIGHT AND SILENCE

BY MAURICE LEVEL

They were old, crippled, horrible. The woman hobbled about on two crutches; one of the men, blind, walked with his eyes shut, his hands outstretched, his fingers spread open; the other, a deaf-mute, followed with his head lowered, rarely raising the sad, restless eyes that were the only sign of life in his impassive face.

It was said that they were two brothers and a sister, and that they were united by a savage affection. One was never seen without the others; at the church doors they shrank back into the shadows, keeping away from those professional beggars who stand boldly in the full light so that passers-by may be ashamed to ignore their importunacy. They did not ask for anything. Their appearance alone was a prayer for help. As they moved silently through the narrow, gloomy streets, a mysterious trio, they seemed to personify Age, Night, and Silence.

One evening, in their hovel near the gates of the city, the woman died peacefully in their arms, without a cry, with just one long look of distress which the deaf-mute saw, and one violent shudder which the blind man felt because her hand clasped his wrist. Without a sound she passed into eternal silence.

Next day, for the first time, the two men were seen without her. They dragged about all day without even stopping at the baker's shop where they usually re-

ceived doles of bread. Toward dusk, when lights began to twinkle at the dark crossroads, when the reflection of lamps gave the houses the appearance of a smile, they bought with the few half-pence they had received two poor little candles, and they returned to the desolate hovel where the old sister lay on her pallet with no one to watch or pray for her.

They kissed the dead woman. The man came to put her in her coffin. The deal boards were fastened down and the coffin was placed on two wooden trestles; then, once more alone, the two brothers laid a sprig of boxwood on a plate, lighted their candles, and sat down for the last all-too-short vigil.

Outside, the cold wind played round the joints of the ill-fitting door. Inside, the small trembling flames barely broke the darkness with their yellow light . . . Not a sound . . .

For a long time they remained like this, praying, remembering, meditating . . .

Tired out with weeping, at last they fell asleep . . .

When they woke it was still night. The lights of the candles still glimmered, but they were lower. The cold that is the precursor of dawn made them shiver. But there was something else—what was it? They leaned forward, the one trying to see, the other to hear. For some time they remained motionless; then, there being no repetition of what had roused them, they lay down again and began to pray.

Suddenly, for the second time, they sat up. Had either of them been alone, he would have thought himself the play-thing of some fugitive hallucination. When one sees without hearing, or hears without seeing, illusion is easily created. But something abnormal was taking place; there could be no doubt about it since both were affected, since it appealed both to eyes and ears at

the same time; they were fully conscious of this, but were unable to understand.

Between them they had the power of complete comprehension. Singly, each had but a partial, agonizing conception.

The deaf-mute got up and walked about. Forgetting his brother's infirmity, the blind man asked in a voice choked with fear, "What is it? What's the matter? Why have you got up?"

He heard him moving, coming and going, stopping, starting off again, and again stopping; and having nothing but these sounds to guide his reason, his terror increased till his teeth began to chatter. He was on the point of speaking again, but remembered, and relapsed into a muttering, "What can he see? What is it?"

The deaf-mute took a few more steps, rubbed his eyes, and presumably, reassured, went back to his mattress and fell asleep.

The blind man heaved a sigh of relief, and silence fell once more, broken only by the prayers he mumbled in a monotonous undertone, his soul benumbed by grief as he waited till sleep should come and pour light into his darkness.

He was almost sleeping when the murmurs which had before made him tremble, wrenched him from an uneasy doze.

It sounded like a soft scratching mingled with light blows on a plank, curious rubbings, and stifled moans.

He leaped up. The deaf-mute had not moved. Feeling that the fear that culminates in panic was threatening him, he strove to reason with himself.

"Why should this noise terrify me? . . . The night is always full of sounds . . . My brother is moving uneasily in his sleep . . . yes, that's it . . . Just now I heard him walking up and down, and there was the same noise . . . It must have been the wind . . . But I know

the sound of the wind, and it has never been like that . . . it was a noise I had never heard . . . What could it have been? No . . . it could not be . . .”

He bit his fists. An awful suspicion had come to him.

“Suppose . . . no, it’s not possible . . . Suppose it was . . . there it is again! . . . Again . . . louder and louder . . . some one is scratching, scratching, knocking . . . My God! A voice . . . her voice! She is calling! She is crying! Help, help!”

He threw himself out of bed and roared, “François! . . . quick! . . . Help! . . . Look! . . .”

He was half mad with fear. He tore wildly at his hair shouting “Look! . . . You’ve got eyes, you, you can see! . . .”

The moans became louder, the raps firmer. Feeling his way, stumbling against the walls, knocking against the packing-cases which served as furniture, tripping in the hole in the floor, he staggered about trying to find his sleeping brother.

He fell and got up again, bruised, covered with blood, sobbing, “I have no eyes! I have no eyes!”

He had upset the plate on which lay the sprig of box, and the sound of the earthenware breaking on the floor gave the finishing touch to his panic.

“Help! What have I done? Help!”

The noises grew louder and more terrifying, and as an agonizing cry sounded, his last doubts left him. Behind his empty eyes, he imagined he saw the horrible thing . . .

He saw the old sister beating against the tightly-closed lid of her coffin. He saw her super-human terror, her agony, a thousand times worse than that of any other death . . . She was there, alive, yes alive, a few steps away from him . . . but where? She heard his steps, his voice, and he, blind, could do nothing to help her.

Where was his brother? Flinging his arms from right to left, he knocked over the candles: the wax flowed over his fingers, hot, like blood. The noise grew louder, more despairing; the voice was speaking, saying words that died away in smothered groans . . .

“Courage!” he shrieked. “I’m here! I’m coming!”

He was now crawling along on his knees, and a sudden turn flung him against a bed; he thrust out his arms, felt a body, seized it by the shoulders, and shook it with all the strength that remained in him.

Violently awakened, the deaf-mute sprang up uttering horrible cries and trying to see, but now that the candles were out, he, too, was plunged into night, the impenetrable darkness that held more terror for him than for the blind man. Stupefied with sleep, he groped about wildly with his hands, which closed in a vise-like grip on his brother’s throat, stifling cries of, “Look! Look!”

They rolled together on the floor, upsetting all that came in their way, knotted together, ferociously tearing each other with tooth and nail. In a very short time their hoarse breathing had died away. The voice, so distant and yet so near, was cut short by a spasm . . . there was a cracking noise . . . the imprisoned body was raising itself in one last supreme effort for freedom . . . a grinding noise . . . sobs . . . again the grinding noise . . . silence . . .

Outside, the trees shuddered as they bowed in the gale; the rain beat against the walls. The late winter’s dawn was still crouching on the edge of the horizon. Inside the walls of the hovel, not a sound, not a breath.

Night and Silence.

When an editor's byline appears on the contents page, an explanation is in order. Initially, this volume was supposed to begin with material drawn from Theodore's stage performances, but he feared the texts would suffer without the visual and auditory aspect of his presentations, so difficult to communicate in cold print. It was therefore agreed to collaborate on an original story that would reflect Theodore's concern with the basic absurdity and terror of the human condition.

"The Possession of Immanuel Wolf" is based on an idea of Theodore's, but though most of the writing was my own, it is nevertheless a true, if unusual collaboration. Without a knowledge of Theodore's life, opinions, and theories—acquired over a period of several years—it would have been impossible to draw the enigmatic figure of the protagonist. As for Wolf's possession, the reader must decide privately whether it is due to simple concussion or metaphysical intervention. But whatever caused it, the brief and bloody career of the Leader stems from the dark psychological desire of the Victim to assume the manner and methods of the oppressor.

THE POSSESSION OF IMMANUEL WOLF

BY MARVIN KAYE AND BROTHER THEODORE

Perhaps the dybbuk always lurked within, biding its time. Or it may have accreted like a malignant growth during the bleak years of Wolf's descent from affluence to mute despair. But it emerged when he was sixty-three and smeared his world with blood.

In that year, a succession of misfortunes and indignities overtook him, most of which could have been averted had he not rotten teeth. But as it was, no amount of dentifrice could disguise from his own abnormally sensitive nose the fulsome odor of decay which issued from his lips and revolted him.

He longed to ask a good dentist to repair his teeth, but his meagre salary forbade such an extravagance. He hardly earned enough to pay his rent and subsist on a bland, starchy diet, and he had no savings. For a long while, he tried to endure the condition, but eventually his jaw began to hurt so much that he feared the infection might spread. Reluctantly, he realized that he would have to bury the tattered cerements of pride and petition the city for aid.

They took his name and age and employee identification number and prodded and poked into the drab details of his lonely life. They forced him to receive a social worker every week in his dingy walk-up apartment—like a convict reporting to a parole officer.

Then, and only then, did they grant him permission to stand on line at a free dental clinic.

He reported precisely at the specified time so as not to offend any clock-work civil servant, but his nicety was unappreciated. He had to stand at the end of a long queue of ragged, querulous indigents. The line seemed to stretch for miles down a dimly lit narrow green hospital corridor, and the idea of the combined stench of hundreds of sets of rotting teeth turned his stomach. When he could no longer refrain from gasping in air, he breathed with his hand over his mouth to cover up the imagined stink with the acrid smell of his own sweating palm.

The line progressed slowly, shuffling a few steps at a time, then halting for several minutes before jerking forward another pace or two. The benches along the sides were filled with seedy men and women of all ages and racial types. Once, someone relinquished a seat and the standees leaning against the grimy plaster walls surged forward to claim the coveted vacancy. Thin elbows poked, knobbed knees prodded, gnarled fists punched. A thin dark-skinned man planted the point of his cane on Wolf's toes. A gaunt woman with whiskers on her lip shoved both aside and dropped onto the empty bench space with a sigh. There were angry murmurs in several languages, but the spate of pushing subsided.

In this fashion, Wolf stood in line for over two hours. At last, as he neared the front of the queue, his bladder demanded relief. He worried about stepping out of place, but could not deny nature.

The toilet stank of urine and institutional soap. There were cobwebs in the corners and wet pools on the floor. A fat man with a pasty face stood near a sink, vainly trying to close his pants. His shaking fingers kept losing hold of the steel tongue of his zipper.

"Ah," he grinned at Wolf, "It's shit when you grow old!" He cackled humorlessly, still trying to zip up his fly.

When Wolf returned to the line, his place was gone. They were taking people waiting behind where he'd stood. He tried to reclaim a position at the front, but angry protests sprang up and half-a-dozen hands shoved him straight into the path of a massive nurse.

She had iron-gray hair twisted into a knot and flabby cheeks the hue and texture of unbaked dough. She brushed Wolf away and told him to get back in line. He tried to obey, but the rest loudly objected, and one thin hag shook a bony fist at him.

"He's shoving in ahead!" she wailed.

"Oh, he *is*, is he?!" the nurse rumbled. "Who in hell *are* you, starting trouble on *my* floor?" She jabbed a finger into his chest. "Get back to the end of the line!"

Wolf tried to explain, but her quivering cheeks flushed and she pushed him with a meaty paw.

"I'm in charge here!" she bellowed. "Do what I say or I'll fix it so you never see a dentist!"

It was no use arguing. Wolf turned around and, with lowered head, returned to the back of the queue. Someone snickered at him as he passed.

It took another hour-and-a-half for him to reach the front again, tired and hungry. By then, the dentists decided it was too late to see any other patients, so he was told to report back another day.

By the time he got back from the clinic, it was too late to eat, and he had to rush to get to work. Even so, he was twenty minutes late.

The funeral parlor was calculatedly quiet. Everywhere one could sense the invisible hand of a Murnau or a Fritz Lang: the thick carpetry, the organ, the chiaroscuro produced by the lighting—all contributed to

an eeriness, a distortion of perspective, a deliberate reverential hush. Even the plants lining the walls were too mannerly, as if afraid to be conspicuous in their vitality.

The director frowned as Wolf hurried in, hung up his ragged jacket, and crossed the antechamber to the recess in which the switchboard was situated. The old man sat down in front of the array of lights, buttons, and wires, affixing the headset over his ears.

The director slid out from behind his polished teak desk, left his office and traversed the gloomy entrance foyer, stopping on the other side of the reception partition. He glared down at Wolf.

"You're late again."

Wolf nodded.

"This makes the third time this month."

He received no answer. His employee sat with lowered head and drooping shoulders.

"I should think," the director resumed, "that since we only use you two nights a week, it would be easy for you to arrange your affairs so as to be punctual!"

Again, Wolf nodded glumly.

"I'll speak plainly, Wolf. You are being tolerated on sufferance. Any irregularity whatsoever will result in termination of employment. *This is your last chance.*"

Pivoting on his heel, the director stepped daintily across the dark inlaid marble floor, reentered his office long enough to wrap a cashmere scarf about his neck and don a grey topcoat with fur collar, then departed for the night, carefully closing the thick walnut door behind him.

His own breath was not the only scent of mortality that disturbed Wolf. Decay pervaded his life.

It rose from the uncollected garbage strewn in the

unlit corners of the stairwell he climbed each night to reach his fifth-floor apartment.

Even in the funeral parlor, headily scented with incense, his sensitive nose detected the putrescence of decomposing flesh.

Corpses terrified him. Though they kept the bodies in the basement, where he never ventured, he imagined their sightless eyes staring upward, penetrating the floorboards, prickling at the soles of his feet, lewdly ogling his back and legs . . .

At midnight, he patched through a call to the embalmer from that man's wife. He hated plugging into the hole connecting the phone with the preparation room. He imagined the formaldehyde wafting up the wires, seeping out of the socket into his chamber.

A few minutes later, the embalmer hurried into the entranceway with his coat on. Explaining that he had a family emergency, he told Wolf to listen for the back bell. There was a hearse scheduled to arrive.

Wolf protested that his job had nothing to do with hearses, but the embalmer left without paying any attention.

Wolf was alone in the mortuary.

Time crept by, and the shadows kept pace. Huddled in his cubicle, Wolf shrank from every night noise and wished the phone would ring to take his mind off the dreadful solitude.

He began to nod off. At 1:45, the back bell clamored, startling him out of an uneasy sleep. Heart pounding, he leapt to his feet.

The hearse driver was in the alleyway. Wolf pushed aside the thick drapes and uncranked a windowpane. He called down to the driver that the embalmer was gone.

"Open the door!" the driver yelled. Wolf went into

the director's office, plucked a set of keys from a hook, returned to the open window, and tossed them out.

"Get down here," shouted the driver, "and help me in with the stretcher! I can't do it myself."

Shuddering, Wolf refused.

The driver cursed and swore. "Get your damned ass down here, and *help me in with this stiff!*"

Shaking his head, Wolf cranked the window shut and retreated to his switchboard, trembling with fright.

The director, learning of the incident the following morning, called Wolf into his office and fired him.

Thomasina Ellice, social worker, wore Pomegranate Crimson lipstick and preferred a bouffant hairdo for her frosted-blond tresses. But otherwise she affected a severity of dress typical of her pinioned nature. She was both icy and passionate and could never reconcile the two. Like so many young women tormented by the demons of her youth, she subscribed in principle to the shibboleths of Chastity and Modesty, though her libido silently mocked her. But since she kept it in rein as tight as the girdles she wore, it operated beneath the surface, torturing her without her conscious awareness.

Thomasina was in her early forties, but looked ten years younger. She wore a gray wool suit, long and sober in cut. Together with her undergarments, it clutched and pressed her curves in an unsuccessful attempt to minimize her femininity. The price she paid was a constant subtle friction on her most personal parts, and though she tried to ignore the teasing pressures, she ultimately surrendered to sensuality, spreading her thighs farther apart when seated than generally thought ladylike. Or sometimes she would sit with one of her welfare cases and ask questions while her legs were crossed immodestly and the upper foot described a pendulum arc up and down.

She was single, and had known few men. To pass her time and exhaust her energy, both of which she possessed in abundance, she devoted herself to Good Causes. She served as a hospital pink lady (person, she amended). She tutored blind students. She distributed collection envelopes for various charities to her neighbors.

Once, she had been a nurse, but now she was a social worker. Twice a week, she sifted through mounds of papers at the municipal office, but the rest of the time she visited with the poor and the elderly, prying and poking into their mundane secrets, all in the name of Charity.

One day, she stood on a sooty landing in a rundown tenement and checked her makeup in a mirror extracted from a smart patent-leather bag slung over her shoulder. Moistening her lips, she rang the bell of one of the apartments.

No one answered.

The climb was exhausting, and Wolf had to stop every few steps to catch his breath. His hand was black with dirt where it clutched the railing, and he had to stop occasionally to flick off a paint-fleck, yet he held tight; only last month Mrs. Eschenlaub had pitched down the stairs and broken her neck. The Super hadn't found her till morning, and by then, she was dead.

On the landing midway between the fourth and fifth floors, he realized someone was waiting by his door and recalled it was the day he was to meet his "parole" officer. Looking up, he spied her legs between the spaces of the stairs. He slowed his pace to a crawl and ducked his head to find the best angle for seeing up her skirt, but the sharp edge of her girdle thwarted his curiosity. He sighed, thirsting in a way he knew he could not slake.

"Good morning," she said, as he climbed the last few steps and approached the door. "I'm Thomasina Ellice."

She stayed the better part of an hour, and he used all his seldom-needed continental charm just to keep her there as long as possible. He was quite taken by her, and she, in turn, found Wolf pleasant and touchingly amusing in his efforts to please her. He spoke of many things, but did not number his loss of employment among them—for fear she might recommend placing him in an old-age home.

When she finally rose to leave, Wolf sought and found her fingers and stooped to press his lips upon them. She was flattered in spite of his age. Besides, any physical contact, no matter how mild, set the demons whispering within her.

She opened the door and stared down the five flights of steps, shaking her head. He asked her what was wrong.

"It's such a long climb," she murmured, "especially for an old man . . ." Her voice trailed away, and he did not catch the last phrase, or he would have feared its implication. Already Thomasina Ellice was thinking in terms of a rest home for Wolf.

Promising to return at the same time the following week, she departed.

Alone, Wolf twisted upon the broken springs of his antique mattress and tried to forget, for the moment, that he was jobless at sixty-three. He thought of Thomasina Ellice and tried to imagine her in bed with him, unclad and amorous. But the precise and special tang her flesh might hold eluded him, and he soon abandoned his erotic dream. A fantasy that held no possibility of coming true was infinitely depressing to him.

That night, he broke his leg.

He lived one floor from the top of the building. Above him was a single large apartment rented by a pair of gay sculptors. Nearly every night, the effete youths threw raucous and interminable parties that were little better than drunken orgies.

No matter how quietly they began, they always grew into riots of high-pitched singing, dancing to acid rock, swearing, shouting, and the gross rutting rhythms of collective sexual engagement.

Wolf, a poor sleeper even with the aid of soporifics, found rest all but impossible when his neighbors congregated. He would politely ask them to lower the music, but they ignored him. He tried to reason with them. They only laughed. Much against his will, he stooped to begging, and they jeered at him, making obscene gestures in the air and calling him vile names.

Once he even phoned the police, but as soon as the patrol left, the orgy doubled in volume, and the next morning, he found filthy words and symbols scrawled on his door.

He finally complained to the rental agent, but was told that since he was the only tenant disturbed by the noise, there was nothing that could be done.

"Frankly," said the agent, "the landlord would be happy to get rid of you, Mr. Wolf." He held up a hand. "No, you're a model tenant—there have been no complaints about you. But the city protects you because of your age, and with your tenant longevity, the rent you pay is much too low. We could lease your apartment at a much better price than we're allowed to charge you. So, the only thing I can say is, if the neighbors bother you, we'd be delighted if you would move elsewhere!"

Of course, Wolf could *not* move. His moderate rent was perhaps the only benefit of his age. But the agent's

message was clear; if he was disturbed by his neighbors, *tant pis*. As a matter of painful fact, the orgies increased in frequency, and Wolf suspected the agent of actively encouraging the neighbors to step up their harassment.

But whatever the reason, on the night after Wolf lost his job, the noise was unbearable. Perhaps they were not any louder than before, but it seemed as if they were—probably because Wolf had not slept in forty-eight hours, and every sound was aggravated within his head. As he listened to the giggling overhead, he turned up his nose in disgust, for he believed he could smell the bitter odor of sweating flesh engaged in the act of unnatural copulation.

There was a sudden shriek, followed by raucous laughter. Wolf, thoroughly revolted by the mental picture the cry conjured, seized a broom and pounded on the ceiling with its handle. The neighbors replied by stamping and thumping on their floor. Wolf, enraged, looked around his living room for some means to retaliate, and his eye rested on the large speaker of his old phonograph.

Wondering why he had never thought of it before, he carefully inspected the apparatus. There was a little leeway to the attaching cord. He might be able to stretch it high enough to jam the speaker against the ceiling next to the heating pipe, which would act as an excellent sound conductor. Then he could hammer the speaker temporarily in place and turn up the volume.

He was pleased with the plan. The cretins on the top floor never played anything but rock—hardly a match for Mahler's Eighth or Shostakovich's Fifth! He pondered, and at last decided to make his declaration of war unmistakable. He chose the beginning of "Also Sprach Zarathustra."

Turning up the volume to full blast, he put the rec-

ord on the turntable, grabbed a hammer and nails, and balanced precariously on a ladder, lofting the speaker. He intended to punctuate the opening hammerbeats of Destiny with his own more prosaic efforts.

But as the organ trembled its initial 30-cycle pedal-note, the ladder on which Wolf was perched vibrated in sympathy and his foot slipped. He swayed for a queasy instant, then, with a yell, fell heavily to the floor, foot turning under the full weight of his body. The speaker crashed down on his head.

Strauss' "Sunrise" shook the room. Not until the ensuing quiet passage could Wolf's voice be heard crying out for help. But no one was listening.

It took Wolf almost half-an-hour to drag himself, inch by painful inch, to the telephone where he called for an ambulance. Fortunately, he knew enough First Aid to tighten his belt around his leg where it bled from the bone sticking through.

When the stretcher-bearers broke in the door, Wolf was already unconscious.

He had broken his ankle and heel and also had a compound fracture of the right shinbone. Because he was indigent, they took him to City Hospital and informed Thomasina Ellice. A surly physician set the bones, ignored all of Wolf's questions, and promptly forgot that the patient existed.

Wolf also had a concussion, but it went undiagnosed and untreated.

The next day, his leg in the cast started to itch furiously; soon it ached. He asked the day-nurse for pain-killer, but she would not give him any. Later, when his discomfort grew worse, he begged her for some kind of drug, but still she refused.

"If you ask me in here again for the same reason," she warned, "I'll disconnect your call-button!" Though

she actually could do no such thing, she found it an effective threat in dealing with the elderly. "I am *not* permitted to dispense narcotics. If your leg hurts, tell your doctor!"

But the physician neglected to look in on him for another day, and by then, his leg was throbbing. Wolf was in agony, but the doctor said offhandedly it was to be expected with a compound fracture. He refused to prescribe pain-killer because (so he told Wolf) the discomfort would soon subside. His real reason was reluctance to dole out the costly drug to a welfare patient.

When Wolf tried at least to get some relief for his still-untreated jaw, the doctor grew angry.

"I'm not a dentist!" he snapped. "If your teeth hurt, go to a clinic once you leave the hospital."

That made Wolf laugh. And laugh. And laugh.

When he did not stop, the physician finally grew alarmed and called the nurse. He wrote a prescription and told her to rush it to the pharmacy.

So Wolf got his pain-killer after all.

His stinging leg woke him in the middle of the night. Though the day-nurse's threats frightened him, the discomfort was so intense that he decided to risk pressing the call-button.

He was unprepared for the night-nurse. She was beautiful. Barely out of her teens, Belinda Quarry had soft golden hair and light blue eyes that danced merrily. Her ingenuous smile dazzled him.

Belinda was friendly and extremely sympathetic. *Of course* she would help. *Of course* she would give him something for the pain. Encouraged by her kindness, Wolf began pouring out his heart to her.

"This is what *I* think!" she declared presently. "You should tell the doctor to open up the cast. The leg

could be infected. Maybe he didn't clean the wound thoroughly."

Wolf objected that he could not force the doctor to do anything, but she disagreed pleasantly, filling his head with stories of protests to citizens' committees, the medical association, and the local news media.

"The hospital doesn't want unfavorable publicity! So, tomorrow, Mr. Wolf, you must speak up for your rights in no uncertain terms!" She smiled encouragingly. "I know *you* can do it!"

And suddenly he also knew he could.

The doctor argued that the pain would grow much worse if he opened the cast, but Wolf, fired by the desire to live up to Belinda Quarry's expectations, insisted. The physician at last wearily consented. When he sawed off the cast, he found the leg tainted with gangrene.

The smell made Wolf sick.

Perhaps because her own father was so often absent from her childhood home, older men had a special appeal for her. She was too intelligent not to realize the transferred affection she was apt to bestow on them was her way of appointing them surrogate parents, but still she felt safe and secure with elderly men, and readily succumbed to her impulse to befriend them. She was able to relax in their presence in a way she could never manage with her amorous, callow contemporaries.

Take Mr. Wolf, for example. He was so sweet, so paradoxically childlike. How proud he was describing how he had confronted the doctor! How eager for her approval—as if *she* were somehow responsible! (She could not for an instant believe she had helped a mature man salvage his self-respect.)

In the nights that followed, she spent hours with

him, visiting whenever it was quiet on the floor and he could not sleep. Mostly she listened as he reminisced about his youth and the ambitions he'd laid aside over the tedious course of the long years. He spoke of loneliness, of nightmares and dreams of power and the actuality of loss. Sometimes he was her time machine, transporting her to bygone eras. Other times, she heard his secret philosophies and dread of death, of sin and retribution. Then she would cast aside her passive role of auditor and soothe his terrors with the optimistic cant of youth.

On the night before Wolf was to be discharged, he took her hand and gazed longingly into her eyes. The curtain was drawn about the bed, shutting them off from the rest of the room, and as she returned his stare, she wondered what wisdom distilled from worldly experience he was about to impart . . .

She was quite unprepared for his declaration of love. He spoke of his fondness for her, and how she was the mind-companion he had never thought would come—he called her “das Ewig-Weibliche” and told of his needs which society forced him to pretend to forego. As he spoke, his hand caressed the contours of her skin, and it was like the familiar, affectionate stroke of a father's hand.

His words disturbed her, and she managed to avoid making any statement which might be construed as a return of affection, but she sat with him, afraid to hurt his feelings. Besides, his touch *was* pleasant. What if he were taking a few liberties? She pitied him his long enforced sexual abstinence. What harm could there be in it? Their surroundings were hardly private enough for him to venture on greater boldness, and she had to admit she liked the feeling he was arousing within. Of course, she had nothing to fear. He would venture no further . . .

In this, she was quite mistaken.

A C-track green curtain concealed the bed, and Wolf took advantage of the fact, soothing her with the gentle drone of his voice as he explored, probed her body. He uncovered her secret parts and hungrily possessed them.

Writhing in his touch, amazed at his daring, her will sapped, she could not stop him. She was at once both eager and disturbed by her own acquiescence. Forbidden fantasies of incestual trysts flooded her mind; she surrendered completely to pleasure. Eyes closed, Belinda whimpered softly, rapidly until at last her passion was appeased.

She rose briskly and began to tuck him in, but his hand closed on her wrist and he stared searchingly into her eyes, and she knew she must admit to herself what she had allowed Wolf to do. Reluctantly, she bent down and touched him, and he sighed, closing his eyes, giving himself to her caress.

Though she proceeded efficiently, her ardor was spent, and the intimacy was now repugnant to her. She shuddered at Wolf's labored breathing, which reminded her of a dying man's rasping struggle for air. His bloodless lips and gray, unhealthy complexion were suddenly hideous and she wondered how he could have seemed, even fleetingly, the beloved relict of an unfulfilled childhood . . . for now Wolf resembled nothing so much to her as the Death of medieval tapestries.

He did not see the revulsion as she terminated her distasteful task. Before he recovered, she hurried from the room to purge herself.

He needed crutches to leave the hospital, but Wolf was in good spirits. The miracle of Belinda's love had revitalized him. Who could have imagined that such a young and desirable woman would become mesmerized

by the charm and sagacity of an old, wealthless wretch like himself? Yet hadn't she agreed to see him that very evening at his apartment?

It happened just before he checked out. He found her at the nurses' station, going off duty. She had Thursdays off, so he begged her to join him at nine for coffee and dessert. (Dinner might have been more appropriate, but he could not afford it.)

She murmured something too low for him to hear, but Wolf took it as her shy assent. He pressed a small slip of paper with his name and address into her hand. She took it with a pallid smile on her lips, but he attributed her reserve to the presence of other nurses in the room.

On the way back to his apartment, he remained in good humor, and even the long and painful climb could not dampen his enthusiasm. But when he reached his landing, he saw he had a visitor.

It was Thomasina Ellice from the Bureau of Social Welfare. He could tell by the serious expression she wore that there was something important and probably unpleasant on her mind concerning him.

He invited her in and offered tea or coffee, but she declined.

"Mr. Wolf," she said condolingly, "I'd better come to the point. As a representative of the city, I'm concerned about your future. We know about your accident, and I've also found out that you've lost your job. It'd be hard enough at your age to find new employment, but with your injury, it will be *extremely* difficult, especially in this depressed economy! I've spoken to your landlord, and he means to put you out if you should default a single rent payment. Given your current financial dilemma, I don't see how you can avoid doing so. By next month, you might be jobless *and* homeless.

"I must bring up something else," she continued, af-

ter a moment's hesitation. "Please don't take offense, but I've noticed how hard it is for you to climb all these stairs. Today you had to contend with a broken leg, but even on my first visit, I observed it took you a long time to mount the final flight—and when you did, you were breathing quite heavily. Forgive me, Mr. Wolf, but I really feel you are in no condition to go on living like this. The physical and emotional strain is too great."

He asked her what he could do to change his lifestyle, and she leaned forward and rested a comforting hand on his knee. He automatically began to pat it. "It's clear," she said, "that the city must make provisions for your welfare. You can't be put out on the sidewalk with no place to go."

By then, he was filled with dread, knowing what she was about to say. The idea of being put in a home was his chief fear when he first considered going to the city for aid. But, hoping forlornly, he asked her what she had in mind.

"The city," said Thomasina Ellice, "maintains many lovely nursing homes equipped with expert personnel. There all your needs will be cared for, and all your cares will be needless." It was a direct quote from the pamphlet issued her during job indoctrination week, and much as she detested the phraseology, somehow she always found herself spouting it, parrot-like, whenever she had to broach the unpleasant subject. Privately, she had a low opinion of nursing homes, based on personal observation, but she was paid to do a job, not to express her personal viewpoint. If she listened to her conscience and cited the various shortcomings of the institutions—the lack of qualified personnel, the indifference of what staff there was, the negligence and occasional downright malicious brutality—it would make her own work all but impossible to perform. The

elderly had to go *someplace*, and it was her duty to see them cared for in a manner that burdened the over-taxed citizens the least. Besides, she had also learned long ago not to inquire too deeply into the specific problems of individual cases; it made her expend useless sympathy, which was neither negotiable nor much appreciated, and it ultimately took a toll of her energy, leaving her less efficient to deal with her other cases.

Naturally she expected Wolf to object, and he did. He had few friends left alive, and those still living were extremely precious to him. But if he moved into a nursing home, they would visit him out of loyalty once, perhaps twice, then, depressed by the proximity of disease and mortality, would come no more.

"But, Mr. Wolf, there will be *many* people at the home! You'll enjoy the company of your peers!"

He shuddered. "Peers!" He would be relegated to slow death amongst wizened mummies—sentient, senile corpses. He said he did not want to spend his final years in misery and despair, with no purpose but to eat and sleep, no goal but death and decomposition.

"It won't be like that," she crooned, sandwiching his hand between hers and unconsciously spreading her legs as she willed him to believe what she knew to be lies. "You'll *see*, Mr. Wolf, you'll *see*. Tomorrow I'll bring the papers and soon you'll pack and move and I'll—" She stopped, embarrassed. She never knew what to do when her clients began to cry. He withdrew his hands and cradled his head in his palms, rocking on his chair and moaning.

Unable to cope with the situation, she rose abruptly, gathered her things, and hesitated at the door to say something that would make him feel less miserable. But she knew there was nothing that would help, so she quietly left.

He lay on his unyielding bed and stared emptily at the featureless white ceiling, tracing and retracing the rivers and chasms described by the cracks in the plaster. He prayed to lose his wits.

But then he remembered Belinda Quarry.

He sat up and looked at the clock. Five more hours before she arrived! She would find some answer to his plight! Glancing around, he saw the mildew and the dust that had accumulated while he was in the hospital.

As he hurried to set the place in order, his spirits began to rise again. How could he have forgotten Belinda? It was she who had counseled him to insist on his rights to the doctor; if she hadn't instilled courage in him, he might have lost his leg. Certainly, she would have some sensible and sunny advice to offer in his present predicament.

When he finally stopped fussing over the apartment, he turned his attention towards himself. He selected his least-frayed suit, and chose a dickey that would be both comfortable and attractive. Then he worried over his hair for a quarter of an hour. He shaved, brushed his teeth and gargled with mouth-wash, sprayed the last of an old bottle of cologne on his neck, collar, and cuffs, polished his shoes to the semblance of a sheen, then inspected himself in a mirror. Dissatisfied with his razor, he shaved a second time.

The lights were a problem. After consideration, he decided to leave the ceiling bulb on, so as not to be unsubtle. But he unscrewed the lamps of his desk fixture and stuck them in a drawer.

He knew she was a romantic, so he picked a recording of Rachmaninoff that hardly skipped. Dusting the disc, he put it on the turntable and positioned the needle halfway across the side, so it would appear he had been listening to it for some time.

The last thing Wolf did was to spray the room with

scented air freshener. He scrutinized himself once more in the mirror and combed his gray hair into place. He wondered whether he ought to have touched up the color, then realized it would have been an unnecessary step. Belinda already knew what he looked like—and yet she could perceive the youth that was trapped within the prison of stale flesh.

Her love was the only miracle he had ever known.

He waited until 9:15 before worrying, then gained an additional ten-minute period of grace by attributing her absence to the vicissitudes of city travel. But when the minute hand moved past the six, he knew she would not come. With sinking heart, he sat upon his bed and listened to the silence that filled his room and his life. The pain he felt was too deep for the catharsis of tears, and as he studied the whorls and tracings that covered the skin of his hands, he sardonically rued the extreme length of his life-line. Around him, the walls seemed to waver and contract, enclosing him in his loneliness like a coffin.

He rose and took the record off the turntable. The composition on the opposite side was Liszt's "Dance of Death." He played it. As its macabre harmonies and rhythms echoed through the room, Wolf opened his arms and welcomed the phantom Belinda within. Ignoring the pain in his leg, he danced in mockery of the gay and flowing figures of his youth, and as he spun and whirled, he might have been the Spectre Death himself waltzing with one of his concubine shades.

The phone rang. Wolf's hopes suddenly leapt. Clicking off the music, he hurried to pick it up, sure that Belinda was stuck after all in a subway station and—

"Please forget about last night," she said. "It never happened."

He did not reply.

"Hello?" she asked. "Are you still on the line?"

He wanted to bellow, scream, cry out in anguish, but instead Wolf answered her casually, as if her presence or absence were of no particular importance. Then he replaced the receiver on its cradle, leaned against his desk and stared bleakly into space, like a gargoyle whose bestial sorrows had deeply touched the sculptor.

He might have remained in the same attitude for hours. But just then, something happened that was to seal his fate as surely as if he had been singled out by the Finger of God.

The stillness surrounding him was shattered by music from above. His upstairs neighbors were beginning another carouse.

It was the turning-point. The entity that was Immanuel Wolf buckled beneath the leaden weight of accumulated torments. All the misery, all the hatred and pent-up rage turned outward and upward. He stared at the ceiling, listened to the stamping feet, the laughter, the effeminate squeals, the stupid mindless shrieks.

He clenched his fist and shook it.

Wolf set to work feverishly, heedless of his aching leg. This time he would neither fall nor fail. When the speaker was attached to the ceiling, he flipped the switch and the massive inferno of sound that was Verdi's *dies irae* shook the plaster and rained a fine, white dust down upon his head.

A loud clatter of footsteps on the stairs. Shouted obscenities. Smiling, he snapped off the power, and the terrifying paean of Hell abruptly died.

There was a fierce hammering at the door and suddenly the wood around the lock began to crack. The noise mobilized him. Striding across the room, he seized a loose length of pipe left by a sloppy maintenance worker, shot back the latch, and yanked the door wide open.

Two men stood in the vestibule. One was white, fat, and pimply, and had hands as big as mallets. The other was a tall, muscular black. Expecting to see the old man cringing in fear at their arrival, they started forward, snarling. But when they saw Wolf, they stopped, suddenly uncertain.

Wolf's eyes, rimmed with red, glowered like flaming coals. His mouth was contorted. His gums were bared like an animal's. In his rage, he had sunk his teeth into his lower lip and a stream of blood ran over his chin and spattered crimson drops upon his chest.

He menacingly pounded the metal pipe against his open hand. No one spoke. The others faced him, tense . . . and then slowly began to retreat.

"Leave him alone," the black murmured warningly, "the bastard's crazy!"

Growling, Wolf raised the pipe and advanced towards them. Suddenly they whirled and ran for the stairs, but Wolf swung his weapon and smashed the fat man's ankle at the precise spot where his own was broken.

A scream of pain. Throwing his arm around his companion, the black half-dragged, half-carried him upstairs. The door slammed, muffling the victim's cries.

Wolf stood on the landing and howled curses and threats at them for fifteen minutes.

Hours passed. The long night waned. but Immanuel Wolf sat statue-like in his room and weighed the world in the balance of his will. The agonies of the past few weeks flickered in his mind like a magic-lantern entertainment at the Grand Guignol. He experienced a nausea of the spirit at the stink of corruption, inhumanity, and pain he was expected to countenance.

He considered the confrontation on the stairwell and also recalled the argument with the doctor who set his

leg. He was amazed and intrigued by his eleventh-hour bravery in both instances. If he were capable of such displays of strength, why had he never been aware of the fact before?

Slowly, a new conviction stole over him: perhaps his destiny had been dictated long, long years ago. It was the only possible answer! All his sufferings were obviously deliberately intended to sharpen his spirit for some important predetermined task . . .

For I am a Burning-Glass!

Fate meant him to serve as the focal point for the fury of the impotent millions.

The Law is what I fashion from the acid of my Wrath!

Some dim vestige of his former self tried to protest, but the new awareness flooding his being beat it down.

For I am He! I am the Leader!

The night waned. Upstairs, the pimply youth moaned as he tossed in his bed.

Sickly morning light straggled through grimy windowpanes, and motes of dust sparkled in the sunbeams. A roach scuttled across the floor-boards to the dark haven it shared behind the wainscoting with rats.

The old man rose and quickly crushed the insect with his toe. His shoulders were no longer stooped. The pain in his leg was forgotten. His eyes glinted with a cold light, and a humorless smile twisted his lips.

The dybbuk was awake at last.

II

During the ride over, Thomasina Ellice attempted to review the papers so there would be no awkward fumbling while she got the old man to sign. But the boy sit-

ting on the other side of the bus was staring at her, and she could not keep her mind on her work. She thought she resented the frank inspection, and privately observed that she lived in the only city where a man would physically appraise a woman so openly, without even pretending interest in his newspaper. Nevertheless, she did not adjust her own posture, although her legs were immodestly crossed. She felt her face begin to flush. A little while later, she realized the boy had stopped staring at her, and this disturbed her even more.

The five flights were as tiring as ever, and she had to catch her breath before knocking on the door. She dreaded a recurrence of Wolf's emotional outburst, but when she heard his voice pleasantly bidding her enter, she was reassured.

She found him sitting on the same chair she'd left him in the day before, yet his appearance was subtly changed. She couldn't put her finger on the difference and she regarded him curiously, trying to isolate the new factor.

He was dressed entirely in black, and his hair fell in careless fashion over one eye. There was a somewhat mocking smile on his face, and he sat as erect upon his chair as if an iron poker were his backbone.

"Sit down, *Ms. Ellice*, sit down," he said. "Tell me what's on your mind."

Sitting beside Wolf, she reeled off her usual speech and displayed descriptive folders with photos of thirty-five local rest homes. Wolf nodded and smiled. She wondered if he were really listening.

As she continued, something about his manner unsettled her. Though his mouth was smiling, his eyes looked grim, and she found it hard to look into them. Normally a patient about to enter a home had many questions, but Wolf just sat there, nodding as though he were indulging a prattling child.

As she ended her spiel, Thomasina ventured another look into Wolf's eyes, and what she saw staggered her. Fierce concentration radiated from his pupils; dark power burrowed into the very core of her being. She felt as if her soul had windows and he was peering through them at her most inadmissible secrets.

She turned away, shaken, and started fumbling with papers. She babbled about the numerous vacancies and told Wolf he could choose any home he fancied . . .

"*Certainly*," he nodded, "but there is time for that. Won't you look at me once more, *liebchen*?"

Reluctantly, she returned his gaze. Though his head still nodded absently, his hypnotic eyes riveted her attention, and his cold voice was unmistakably ironic.

"After you tuck me away in a home, will you come each week and visit me? And will you bring me strudel and sit with an old man and tell him stories of the outside world?"

She stammered that she would. Perhaps she should not have rushed to commit him. He sounded dangerous, unhinged.

"I am *not* mad!" Wolf said, reading her thought. He stood up with such force that the chair toppled over behind him. "*Do you know who I am?*"

She shook her head, wishing she could make her retreat, unable to take her eyes off him.

"I am the *Leader*!" he said in a soft, incisive voice, advancing on her.

Thomasina, smiling nervously, began backing to the door.

"Where are you going, Thomasina?" he asked menacingly.

Her professionalism came to her aid, and she stood her ground. It was not the first time she had been confronted with a dangerously senile patient. She did not

want to hurt Wolf, but she *was* trained to defend herself . . .

"Let me show you something," he remarked, again replying to her unspoken thought. He knelt by a dining-room chair, gripped one of the legs in his fist and squeezed until his knuckles turned white. Slowly, steadily, he rose to his feet, lofting the chair. The smile never left his face as he continued to squeeze until the chair-leg began to splinter. He lowered it to the floor, brushing off his hand.

"I know you think that old men are nothing but bags of pudding," he said, "but *I* am Immanuel Wolf, and Immanuel Wolf is *the Leader*! The hatred of the forgotten and the damned fills me with strength!" His eyes burned into her and she lost the power to retreat. He drew near until they were only inches apart.

"You think it a miracle that at my age I should suddenly realize my destiny? But it is just because I *am* old that enlightenment has finally come! I am *He*! The Leader!" He pounded one fist against the other. "You think despair has driven me insane," he continued in a cold, calm voice. "I say to you I have discovered my mission, and it fires me. But there is no time for idle words! I must gather my army, and I need lieutenants!"

He grasped her by the shoulders. She did not resist.

"*We* need them, Thomasina! For *you* are also chosen. The Leader has chosen you!"

She thought it best to humor him. Drawing her close, he touched her with a familiarity she had long craved, if not from him, at least from someone.

"Ah, *liebchen*," he breathed, "you think an old man cannot satisfy you, but I say to you that you are wrong. Listen to the voices that whisper! I tell you that my autumn is wilder than your summer, Thomasina. My winter is hotter than your spring!"

The demons crooned in her ears, and her psyche guided Wolf to the pleasures it thirsted after. She followed him to the bed, her patina of propriety demolished, a fortress built from eggshells . . .

Later, he described his scheme to her, and she sensed with some amazement that it might work. He meant to draw public attention to the shameless condition of the nursing homes. She rested on one elbow, listening, as he strode back and forth, eyes fixed on hers.

"So you see, Thomasina, it is the *only* way to protest the fiendish treatment of the elderly. I will mobilize resistance in every home. Once we gain national attention, *then* our Cause shall be championed."

He read her perfectly. Her libido was the key to enlisting her cooperation, but it was too early to entrust her with the actual scope and purpose of his Crusade. Better to tell her tales about orderly protests, shows of passive opposition.

She was impressed with the plan. After all, if he had to live out the remainder of his days in a home, shouldn't he study the conditions? All he needed was a little help from her.

"Therefore," Wolf stated in the tone of a logician demonstrating an inescapable conclusion, "it will be essential for you to assist your Leader. Pretending to select a home, you will transfer me from one to another, keeping this apartment as a base of operations—"

She began to interrupt, but he held up a hand, forestalling her. "Yes, yes, Thomasina, eventually I will choose a home to live in. But first I must visit all of them, enlist officers, and spread my message. I will call you each time I have completed my work, and you will bring me back here before taking me to another home."

Thomasina protested that the landlord intended to

rent out Wolf's apartment as soon as possible. How could she—

She stopped, suddenly frightened.

The veins in his neck bulged and the blood rushed to his head. His eyes protruded and he shook his fists at her. "Must *I* do all the thinking?" he bellowed. "I have important things on my mind and cannot be bothered with trivia!"

She apologized, blaming herself for her lack of imagination—anything to appease him. She swore she would take care of the apartment problem without disturbing him about it again.

"Good," said Wolf mildly, calm once more. "I *knew* I could rely on you, *liebchen*."

Drawing her close again, he caressed her, taking her mind off his display of temper. She responded hungrily.

Farleigh House was situated in the worst rundown section of the most remote borough of the city. Weed-choked empty lots surrounded it on three sides, while the fourth abutted an abandoned mansion in which rodents and reptiles made their nests.

Thomasina opened the rusty screen door and beckoned him into the lobby. He peered disapprovingly at the drab green walls, the few light sockets with bulbs that only occasionally worked, the mildewed furniture and cracked flooring. He shuddered as she took his arm and led him into a reception cubicle. A sour man with sharp eyes and square-cut beard regarded Wolf unenthusiastically, demanding his name.

Thomasina explained her charge was in delicate health and might require special attention. The bearded man snorted, sucked his teeth, but said nothing. He pressed a dusty buzzer on his desk. A frowsy nurse appeared. She told Wolf to follow her.

He walked down a dingy corridor behind the nurse.

She led him through a low door into a cubicle with a bed, dresser, and chair, no larger than 9 x 12, Wolf estimated. This, he was informed, was his new home.

After he put away his meagre possessions, Wolf went to dinner and tried to eat, but could not. The other inmates stank of sweat and excrement, and when one of them threw up in the dining-room, no one cleaned the mess. The sick man fell with his face in his tray and might have smothered in his own vomit had Wolf not rescued him.

Thomasina had said she thought the director of the home was shaving off profit for himself by purchasing substandard supplies. Once he tasted the wretched food, Wolf believed it. He spat it out and hoped the next place he visited might have a better kitchen.

He explored the building, taking care not to be noticed. Everywhere he went, he saw patients under heavy sedation. (He was to learn it was a common practice in city rest homes; it kept the inmates docile and relieved the overworked, undermanned staffs.) As he stealthily crept through corridor after corridor, he was revolted by the prevalent stench of urine and feces. He heard patients cry out in vain for bedpans. Others simply voided where they stood, sat, or slept, and the nurses permitted them to lie in their own pollution. He saw nurses strike patients. One hit an old woman on the jaw, and the victim whimpered she wouldn't do it again—what, Wolf had no idea.

Grim determination darkened his face.

The time has come!

He entered a sunroom, strode over to an ancient black-and-white TV, and clicked it off.

Two of the three women watching the program dared not protest. The third, though one of the privileged few in the home, regarded Wolf with keen interest.

"It is time to rise against our oppressors," he told

them in a harsh whisper. "They have enslaved us, and left us here to die, but we shall strike back! Join me, and we shall be united on the day of victory!"

One of his three listeners was a black woman with a bandaged eye. She was so heavily drugged she was not sure that Wolf's voice was not the audio portion of the TV show she'd been watching.

The other two were more alert. One, a thin woman with stringy gray hair, smiled and displayed a loose bridge. She was captivated by Wolf's intensive stare. The last of the three was a fat woman named Gerta Brock, one of the elite. She ate good food and slept on a new, soft mattress, and took no drugs unless she asked for them. In exchange for these favors, she was visited a few times each week by the director of the home. He had a passion for large buttocks, and if necessary, would have paid dearly for the permission to whip Gerta Brock's massive bottom. But the director's trysts did not slake her own unrelieved longings. Thus she eagerly turned her attention to Immanuel Wolf and, with her eyes half-closed, stared straight at his crotch.

"I have seen a vision of the day of triumph!" he told her, eyes blazing. "You will be my Joan of Arc, my flame, my sword, commanding thousands of men! Give no thought to your age, for my teachings are true, and we shall find reservoirs of strength within us, waiting to be tapped. Victory shall be ours. *Victory*. We shall trample our oppressors into the dust, and **WE WILL CONQUER! *Death to the Young!***"

She sat forward in her chair, breathing fast. The strange old man thrilled her. She felt young again. His flashing eyes, the urgency of his hushed voice were clarions to her spirit.

"*I am the Leader!* I command and you shall arise, beautiful and terrible! A warrior, an Amazon! Sarka

cutting the throats of her enemies in their sleep! When I call you, you shall *not* fail!"

Raising both hands in a curious gesture of salute, Wolf strode out of the room.

Gerta Brock was tremendously excited. She started massaging her massive breasts between her hands. She spread her legs apart and a stream of urine gushed out in a pool on the floor.

"Joan of Arc!" she moaned. "Joan of Arc! Did you hear him?"

Her scrawny companion stared at the door, mouth still gaping, and put her hand beneath her skirts. "Oh, Gerta," she trembled, "I haven't wanted a man for years!"

The black woman stared at her companions and cackled gleefully. She did not see them with Wolf's eyes.

The scheme gave her many details to contend with, but Thomasina found little difficulty in coping. Though transferring him required additional paperwork, her superiors expected her to use her own discretion in handling her case-load, so no one scrutinized the somewhat irregular procedure she was following in placing one Immanuel Wolf. The directors of the homes said nothing; patients came and went, and they didn't care.

The apartment was a stickier problem, since the rental agent knew she'd been planning to remove Wolf from the premises. But she explained that placement often took time, then paid the rent and some under-the-table money so the agent would keep his mouth shut to the landlord.

She saw Wolf once or twice a month, depending on how quickly he was able to work at each institution. She almost had a change of heart once he was settled in the first home, but when he phoned a few days later,

something in his voice overcame her doubts and she went ahead and ordered his transfer.

Though she did not know precisely what he was doing at the various homes, she thought she had a fairly good general idea. He evidently sounded out the inmates until he could find one person motivated enough to be lieutenant of the Cause. That person would act as coordinator with the rest of the patients after Wolf left, and would pass the word when the actual hour of protest was set.

Time passed. There was only one more home for Wolf to visit. She asked him what was going to happen next and he said he was about to fix a definite date for the demonstration. Thomasina was eager to know the precise form it would take, but Wolf would not tell her whether it would be a hunger strike, a sit-in, or some other mode of peaceful agitation. The important thing was to attract the attention of the media, and then, the government.

"Patience, *liebchen*," Wolf said on the phone. "Your Leader will reveal all at the proper time. Our little *putsch* will not go unnoticed . . ."

The ringing phone woke her up.

She gazed blearily at the clock. 5:00 A.M. She picked up the receiver, and it was Wolf. His voice was exultant.

"We are ready!" he said abruptly. "Tomorrow night!"

She shook off her lethargy.

"The uprising is at 10:00 P.M. You will get a cab, Thomasina—a large one. Arrange to be sitting in it shortly after ten. Do *not* be late! Wait across the road from the home. You must not secure the taxi anywhere near your apartment, or mine!"

She asked how long she should wait.
"Until I come out and join you."

The next night, she hailed a cab early and reached the home by a quarter to ten. The driver was suspicious when he saw the place across the road was so dark, but since he was being paid the time on the clock, he settled down with her to wait Wolf's arrival.

The night was pitch-black, and the only sounds were the sussuration of crickets and the occasional rumble of a passing vehicle. A few minutes before ten, the driver asked whether she would mind if he switched on the radio. Since she did not object, he fiddled with the dial until he found an all-night country station and began to pound the steering wheel in time to the music.

At ten o'clock, she strained to see whether there were any telltale lights on at the home, but could discern nothing. The radio covered up any sounds that might have reached her ears.

At ten minutes past the hour, just when the driver began to grow restless again, she saw two figures hurrying across the road toward the cab. With a sigh of relief, she swung open her door and stepped out upon the grass.

Wolf was one of the approaching men. The other was tall, cadaverously thin, and wore bifocals whose lenses glinted in the headlights. He wore a long topcoat over pajamas.

She asked whether the protest was successful, and they nodded.

"It is only the first incision," said Wolf in a brooding voice, "but we have cut deep enough to touch upon the cancer."

The other stepped over to the driver's door and rapped on the glass.

"Come out," he ordered. "We want to pay your bill."

The driver opened his door, slid off the seat and stood facing the tall man. He did not see Wolf circling around behind him, but Thomasina noticed the Leader as he raised his arm. Something glinted in the headlight-beam.

Suddenly she screamed.

The driver swung around, and the descending scalpel sliced across the sleeve of his coat. With a shout, he sprang backward.

"*Death to the Young!*" Wolf screamed. The tall man snarled and tried to grab hold of the driver, but received a punch in the midriff which doubled him over. The driver dashed off towards the road.

"Into the car!" Wolf snapped. His lieutenant obeyed, clambering onto the driver's seat. Wolf hustled Thomasina roughly into the back of the cab, and got in beside her. "Start the engine, Gruebner! Run him down!"

"I can't see! I lost my glasses!" Gruebner protested.

"*Run him down! I command, animal—you obey!*"

Gruebner put the vehicle in drive, stepped heavily on the gas pedal, and spun the wheel. The car lurched and twisted, entering the highway at an angle. The headlights picked out the fleeing man about twenty-five yards down the road. Gruebner turned the wheel and aimed in the general direction of the fugitive. Thomasina screamed again. Wolf, turning on her, smacked her sharply along the side of her head.

"*Shut up, bitch! I am in charge!*"

Tears started to her eyes, but she dutifully put her hand over her mouth and stifled her sobs. It was then that she saw the blood spattered on Wolf's shirt.

"He's getting away!"

"No, my Leader!" Gruebner said, stamping on the gas and engaging the car in overdrive. They shot for-

ward. There were perhaps ten yards between the fleeing man and the front bumper . . .

Five yards . . .

"LOOK OUT, IDIOT!" Wolf screamed in fright.

The running man suddenly dashed off to the right and dived into a ditch at the lip of a culvert. Gruebner automatically swung the wheels in that direction, and before he could apply the brakes, the cab careened into a safety railing and stopped with a loud crunch, forcibly hurling Wolf against the partition.

Thomasina, unhurt, was relieved to see the driver escape into the darkness.

"*Swine!*" said Wolf. "You tried to murder me!" Gruebner babbled his innocence, but his plea fell on deaf ears. Wolf got out of the vehicle and beckoned his henchman to follow. Gruebner did so, shivering with terror.

In the beam of the headlights, Thomasina saw them standing together, but could not hear what they were saying. Suddenly Wolf's arm rose and fell, and her ears rang with Gruebner's shriek.

The thin man sank to his knees, clutching his bleeding neck with both hands.

There was a low tap at her door and Gerta Brock bade her visitor enter. Though all the lights were out, she could distinguish his square-cut beard in silhouette.

The director closed the door and approached the bed. She rolled over and he mounted her naked body, withdrawing a leather crop from his vest. She reached out her hand and clicked on the table-lamp.

Two patients in the shadows stepped forward and grabbed his ankles. The gaunt old woman who was Gerta Brock's companion grasped him with bony hands, choking off his wind.

Gerta moaned in ecstasy as the director's face was

pushed forcibly down against her ample flesh. She fantasized he was the Leader. It had been many years since she enjoyed the pleasure of intimate contact and it took her a long time to reach her climax.

By then, the director was dead of suffocation.

Thomasina cringed against the back seat, afraid Wolf might think her behavior merited the same punishment as Gruebner's. But he got in and, saying nothing, started the engine and pulled away from the barrier. His hands smeared the steering wheel scarlet.

Then Wolf drove into the private entrance road of another rest home, turned out the headlights, and, just before they reached the front of the building, shut off the motor. Almost immediately, the door opposite the driver's seat was yanked open, and a pale, fat woman got in, slamming the door behind her. Her pink fingers were so plump she could scarcely bend them at the joints, and her hands shook. She pressed her fists upon her knees to steady them.

"*Well, Gerta?*" Wolf demanded.

"Thirty-three!" she wheezed proudly, rocking rhythmically back and forth. "Thirty-three, thirty-three!" she repeated.

Wolf switched on the motor. They stopped for three other officers: a sinewy old Scot named Ewan Bell; Ivan Blasko, a taciturn gypsy, and Peter Marianus, a giant with blue, unblinking eyes. Each time an officer entered, Wolf demanded a report of fatalities. But the fat woman, ignoring all the other numbers, crooned happily to herself, time and again, "*Thirty-three! Thirty-three . . .*"

Wolf parked the cab several blocks away and led them to his apartment, where the other officers, he explained, would rendezvous with them. They huddled in

doorways and scuttled out when no one was looking, ducking again when there was danger of being observed. Only Thomasina and Wolf were fully dressed. The rest wore topcoats over hospital pajamas.

A small crowd of escaped patients waited in the entranceway, and after they all entered the apartment, many others joined them within a short time. At last there were more than thirty of them jostling one another for a better look at their Leader.

The strangest of Wolf's lieutenants was an incredibly ancient Levantine with toothless mouth and prune-puckered skin. He wore a waistcoat, an ornate watch with chain dangling from the lower pockets of his vest, and a set of scuffed spats. He reminded Thomasina of Schnitzlerian Vienna or perhaps the fussy precision of Edwardian English costume. He leaned upon a gnarled staff and did not join in the ghoulish gaiety. While the others toasted their Leader, the Levantine stood as motionless as a corpse and stared at Wolf.

The leader wore black slacks and sweater and had donned an old pair of black boots that were gray with the dust of the closet in which they had lain. One leg dangling carelessly over the other, he sat on the edge of the bed, arm flung around Thomasina's shoulders, and listened to his officers describe their macabre activities at the rest homes. From time to time, Wolf planted a sloppy kiss on her pale lips, but she was too numb either to respond or resist.

After they had all spoken, everyone turned to the Levantine. Gaze still fixed on Wolf, the old man spoke in a thin, eerie voice corroded with disuse.

"The Fire," he said, *"begins to bite the Frost!"*

His cicada-like voice made everyone uneasy. When it became apparent that he did not intend to say anything more, Marianus, the giant, began to protest.

Jumping to his feet, Wolf strode over to the tall offi-

cer and smacked him hard across the cheek with the back of his hand.

"Idiot!" he roared, eyes bulging, face suffused with blood, "*I am the Leader!* It is for *me* alone to determine when a report is sufficient!"

Marianus apologized, stooping to kiss Wolf's boots. The Levantine smiled, but no one noticed.

Wolf strode back and forth, eyes glowing with an unholy light. Suddenly his arm swept in a wide arc to indicate Thomasina on the bed.

"That woman," he sneered, "thinks I have betrayed her! She is miserable because she feels she has contributed to innocent deaths. She does not comprehend my Gospel!" His voice modulated into an oratorical sing-song. "I say to her that faint-hearted measures do not win causes. If we had engaged in peaceful demonstration, they would have beaten us, left us to starve! But we have chosen not to play the Roman fools and fall upon our own swords! The Tree of Revolution must be nourished with the blood of the enemy, and our enemy is the Young! Heads must roll! Carcasses must swing from every lamp-post!"

His voice, which had risen to a shriek, dropped to a dramatic whisper. "Those that we executed were not innocent! The administrators who store us away in warehouses to waste and rot are ghouls! The nurses and orderlies who pinch and bully their charges are torturers! The doctors who pour drugs into their patients or bore holes in their brains to make them helpless are murderers of the spirit, *and* the body! They are all our enemies, and they must die! It is kill or be killed! *Death to the Young!*"

Wolf suddenly pointed a finger at his disciples. "I tell you what is even more deplorable. The corrupt so-

ciety in which we exist in pain has branded *us* criminals. And what is our crime? We are *old*. The dust eats us, converts our bones and sinews into the ash of loss, of never having gained, of seeking and not finding. Our deluded brains, when we were young, asked riddles, comfortable in the illusion of time. But now we are all judged guilty!! Why? Because we have lived too long. Because we drank too greedily of life and still endure beyond what our society considers a proper span, and because we have not amassed vast wealth as an excuse for our longevity, they stuck us into obscure corners to die." He pounded his desk. "But we *won't*! Though our limbs are withered and our strength is nearly gone, we have the accumulated wisdom and cunning of our years. Our enemy clings to life and youth, and is vulnerable. *But we*—what do *we* care if we die a few months sooner or later? Cancers gnaw our vitals and soon we shall be food for worms. We have little to risk, little to lose, and much to gain, so we dare to venture much!"

"Hail to the Leader!" shouted Gerta Brock. "He shows the way!"

"*He shows the way!*" repeated Ewan Bell, the old Scot. "Hail to the Leader! Long live the Leader!"

The rest of the lieutenants echoed the acclamation, chanting in unison.

"For I am a Burning-Glass!" shouted Wolf. "*I* am the Vessel of your Wrath! There will be no end of slaughter until we are all avenged! Until they recognize our Cause, blood shall flow freely *and heads will roll!!*"

"Heads!" his officers repeated.

"Heads will roll!" roared Wolf.

"HEADS WILL ROLL!" they clamored in reply.

And then there was a pounding on the ceiling.

Wolf looked up and smiled.

The shouting was bad enough, but when the old man started playing loud music again, it was the last straw. The other time, there were only two of them, but now eight young men thundered down the stairs and hammered at Wolf's door.

The music stopped, and the portal swung open silently.

"Come in, come in," Wolf crooned, "I've been waiting for you."

They all surged forward, then stopped, wondering why he did not seem afraid . . .

The room was dimly lit. Wolf, alone, was seated behind his desk, hands clasped. Despite the ferocity of his stare, his voice was low and soothing.

"Once," he said quietly, "an old man lived here. He was so poor and wretched that there was only one consolation left him, one refuge from the searing horror of his reality—that of sleep . . ."

They stood listening, hypnotized by the soft menace of his voice. A lock of hair dangled over one eye, and he glowered at them with the unblinking intensity of a fanatic.

"That pitiful old man," Wolf continued, "was unable to sleep, as much as he needed rest. And do you know why? Because some young bastards living above him celebrated their animalism each night by playing cretin music and rutting like stinking, greasy pigs."

The eight began to mutter angrily, but Wolf abruptly stood up, addressing them harshly.

"I am the Leader! I say you are filthy beasts, not fit to inhabit this earth! I condemn you to death!"

They began to laugh and jeer—but suddenly they found themselves surrounded. Hands like claws clutched their throats; fingernails dug deep into their skin, preventing them from crying out. So many hands grasped them, they could not even struggle.

Behind them, the front door slammed and the lock clicked.

Wolf pulled the blanket away from Thomasina and helped her sit up. Her hands were tied and there was a gag in her mouth.

"Look, *liebchen*! Are these more of the innocents you would save? Should the rest of us meekly accept the lingering death our society metes out while perverts such as *these* live—like grubs battenning on manure?"

He nodded to his lieutenants and Thomasina watched with horror as scalpels were placed carefully against the intruders' necks. She tried to look away, but Wolf would not permit it.

"My people must take their time," Wolf explained, squeezing Thomasina's breasts. "Their fingers tremble from age and infirmity. Palsy, arthritis, all the afflictions that render old hands unsteady—"

As he spoke, the scalpels slowly, slowly began to slice into the victims' skins. They tossed and flailed but could not pull away. Their assassins held them as easily as if they were babies clinging to their parents' arms. They whimpered, and one managed to yank his head aside for an instant to scream, but they quickly secured him and stuck a razor deep into his windpipe. The killers wielded their knives like fiddle-bows, drawing them in long sweeps. Blood poured out onto the victim's shirts.

Thomasina stared, revolted, fascinated. Wolf rubbed his hand in circles upon her nipples and she thrust out her chest.

"Look!" cackled Gerta Brock. "*The jugular!*"

Wolf turned Thomasina in the indicated direction and she watched as a great jet of gore arced from one neck. It was as obscene, as private an act as if the man were urinating. Thomasina pressed her thighs together,

excited and inflamed by the helplessness of the eight men . . .

Unexpectedly, Wolf pulled the gag from her mouth and cut the ropes that bound her. He trusted his evaluation of her instincts, and was not wrong. Thomasina threw herself upon the last man and fondled him as the blood spurted from his jugular. Shudder after shudder racked her body until at length she slumped to the floor, exhausted.

Wolf lifted her. She stared lovingly into his face.

"My Leader!" she whispered.

Then she began to vomit.

III

Sit, my son, and be still, for I will tell you strange things.

Formlessness filled the Void, and there was Frost. Death, the absence of heat, is eternal, and reaches outward to the very corners of the undefined universe.

And then impermanent Flame sprang up to challenge the ice-filled night. Raging, it shaped ash into planetary balls and transmuted the Frost to seas of incipient life.

But always the Flame flickered and dimmed and always the Frost returned. And at the last hour, the Frost may extinguish all heat forever and convert unstable elements into the ultimate ice that will swallow up the very Void itself.

In all the weary eons that I have watched the eternal battle of Frost and Flame, how many conquerors have I seen assail the cold fortress, only to be conquered themselves? And after the tyrants came the prophets

whose trumpetings spun bloody patterns into being. But none dared confront the ice-spectre head-on . . .

Except for you, the latest, most pitiful of leaders, filled with the impotent fury of old age. You alone recognize the horror that is Frost and do battle for the Flame.

But you must not permit your thirst for vengeance to divert you from your Purpose. Bloodshed is unavoidable, but do not love it overmuch, or the Resurrection of the Flesh will be at hand!

I will watch the progress of your crusade. If you fail in your charge, I shall leave you—to seek some other champion of the Flame.

A cold December breeze stirred the long blades of grass and weeds that ringed the monument. A church bell rang the vesper hour, and mourners hurried to quit the premises before the gates were locked.

Soon, the cemetery was deserted, save for winter birds that shivered in leafless branches. Neat rows of headstones stretched down limitless vistas and across broad gravel avenues. Here and there, a twig bent nearly double with the weight of early snows, and patches of frost checkered the neatly cropped lawn.

In a remote corner of the graveyard, one ancient vault thrust against the chalky sky. The family it belonged to had long since died. A trust fund maintained the massive tomb. Yet there was corrosion upon the metal hardware affixing the great door to the portal, and the padlock hasp had long ago been eaten away by rust.

Inside, a barren marble floor was encompassed by four banks of sealed-in coffins, each housing the mortal part of one who had once tried life and unwillingly spat out the taste.

It was here, in the dreary haven of the dead, that

Wolf fled with Thomasina after the slaughter of the neighbors. The rest of his crew found quarters in alleys and doorways, but every night they reported to their leader, telling him how many young people they had murdered the night before. They sat on their haunches on a floor so thick with dust that it was like a carpet, and regaled one another with their bloody feats of bravery.

Curiously, ever since the night of the initial *putsch*, Wolf had grown morose and uncommunicative. He showed no interest in the stories of his officers, and Thomasina generally served as his mouthpiece.

"The Leader," she said, "wonders how much publicity our Cause has attracted."

"The police," Marianus replied, "are looking for all of us, especially the Leader." He regarded Thomasina. "They do not know what to make of *your* disappearance. Some think you are dead. But that miserable cab driver's report raises some doubts. At the very least, the authorities want you as a material witness."

"Yes, yes," she said impatiently, "but do they *respect* our power? How do the media treat us?"

Marianus shrugged. There was an awkward silence, then Thomasina spoke.

"So it is as the Leader feared: we are regarded as lunatics, senile freaks! *Isn't that correct?*"

Marianus bowed his large head in affirmation. No one spoke, but all eyes turned upon Wolf.

And still the Leader said nothing.

At last, for want of any clear sign of leadership, Thomasina opened the question for discussion and encouraged the lieutenants to speak their minds. She looked from one wrinkled face to another, but the only things that greeted her were a series of gaping, toothless mouths and the sounds of laboring breath. Without Wolf to prompt them, they had nothing to say.

Then Gerta Brock spoke up. Rocking her flabby haunches, she stroked the gray stubble of her double-chin and cackled the words she thought her Leader would want to hear.

"More blood," she said gleefully. "More death."

The others repeated her words like a mystic shibboleth. "More blood! More death!" they chanted monotonously, slowly gathering volume and force.

Wolf sprang to his feet and demanded silence. He stared at them scornfully.

"There is only one among you whose voice I wish to hear!" He turned to the Levantine, leaning on his cane in a far corner. That individual nodded at Wolf and spoke in his strange ghostly whisper.

"*The Mind*," he stated, "*is keener than the sharpest sword!*"

Wolf paced, considering the import of the message. Wheeling abruptly on Thomasina, he barked orders in staccato fashion. "Bring paper! Envelopes! A typewriter, if you can risk it—or at least a good pen. I want them tomorrow!"

She rose quickly, checked the money in her handbag, and without a word hurried off.

Wolf addressed the others. "We have wasted our time on the insignificant! In the next several days, your job will be both crucial and dangerous. You shall get in touch with every old person—whether relative, acquaintance, or friend—who can be trusted. We need reinforcements wherever we can find them. I shall build a web of minds, a network of malice!"

For I am a Burning-Glass!

"First," Wolf continued, matter-of-factly, "you must contact the sub-lieutenants recruited at the rest homes. Marianus, seek out Gruebner's replacement. Next, I will draw up a list of names of—"

Gerta Brock's laughter interrupted him. "More blood!" she ranted. "More death!"

Walking over to her, Wolf reached down and gently tilted up her chin, holding it tenderly in his hand. She stared adoringly at him.

"You love death better than our Cause," he said quietly. "You must serve as an example to my people, so that henceforth they will revere the Flame!" Then, without warning, he drew back his foot and kicked her squarely in the windpipe with the blunt toe of his boot. She collapsed, gasping, hands clawing at the earth.

Wolf raised both hands in the air and, in a reverential tone, proclaimed, "Long live Life!"

And his followers replied, "Long live Wolf!"

Gerta Brock thrashed on the grimy floor like a fish in the bottom of a boat. The dust streaked her nightgown. Her face turned pallid blue and she uttered horrible choking noises. At a sign from Wolf, Marianus dragged her outside and dumped her unceremoniously in the snow. The others crowded about the door, eagerly watching her dying struggles.

Wolf regarded them with disgust, then screamed for them to get out. "And don't leave her filthy carcass where it can be found!" They obeyed with alacrity, scrambling out of the vault as fast as they could.

Alone, Wolf slumped down in a corner and began to whimper. If his lieutenants heard, they made no comment. None dared investigate the unfamiliar sound coming from within the tomb.

Thomasina returned early the next morning while it was still dark. It was freezing inside the crypt. She put down her supplies and lay beside Wolf, huddling close for warmth. As soon as she touched him, he sprang up with a cry of terror and cowered in a far corner.

"What is it?" she asked. "It's me, Thomasina!"

"They're coming," he whispered. "Their blood runs on the floor and engulfs us! They drag us beneath the red flood!"

"*Who?*" she demanded. Wolf flung out his arms and clung to her neck, crying. They remained in the same attitude for several minutes, but Wolf said nothing further. At last, he fell asleep.

When he awoke, the sun was filtering through the mortar-cracks. Thomasina, because of the awkward position in which Wolf had gone to sleep, had not closed her eyes.

Wolf looked up at her and spoke.

"Butchers," he remarked bitterly.

"What?"

"They are *all* butchers."

"Who are?"

"My glorious lieutenants! They are bloodthirsty animals, as bad as the degenerates they executed. They do *not* understand the Cause—its scope is beyond them. Do they really think I would concentrate my talents on simply alleviating the sufferings of old age? They cannot comprehend my plan!"

"Which is?"

Wolf looked at her, and a sly expression crossed his face. "Ah-hah, but how do I know that *you* are prepared? Shall I reveal the grand tapestry of history? No, *liebchen*, remain in ignorance the while—but be prepared for giants! *Giants!* Your Leader paves the way for the next thousand years, when—"

His voice faltered. Inexpressible grief filled his eyes and he bowed his head low. Tears welled up, ran down his furrowed cheeks. She put out her hand and touched him gently. He pressed her hand and brought it to his lips.

"I am unworthy to be Leader, my darling," he moaned. "I should be godlike, but the lures of earth

drag me down. I am debased. Who will scourge the unworthiness from me? *Who* will undertake to purify me?"

He stared at her as he spoke. She remained silent at first, but as always, whenever she looked into his eyes, her will crumbled.

"Tell me what to do," she said, blushing.

Wolf reached out his hands, touched her breasts, traced the curve of her hips. He lay upon the cold floor, his gray hair resting in the dirt. Regarding her through half-closed eyes, he whispered, "Sanctify me, for I am *filth*. Let me be reborn!"

She stood up, peeled away her garments and stood above his supine figure. She regarded the helpless body of her Leader, saw the supplication in his eyes, and suddenly was filled with acid scorn . . .

"Yes," he breathed. "*Yes!*"

"Naturally it's an idle threat," said the President, seated in his Oval Office, "but I cannot stress too strongly that we must regard them as extremely dangerous!"

"Then you think it's possible they *will* attack some of the celebrities on the list?" the *Sun-Journal* reporter asked.

"Who knows?" the President asked. "None of it makes sense. Why are some of the names even there in the first place? Assuming Wolf is not totally irrational, what possible grudge could he hold against some of the people he threatens? His list includes seventy-five people—politicians, ambassadors, prominent doctors and attorneys, actresses, sports figures, and models living in twenty-three different states. How can a mere handful of decrepit lunatics destroy over six dozen persons scattered throughout the country?"

"But surely something is being done to protect the

'targets' from harm?" a correspondent for a major TV network asked.

"The authorities have been notified and ample police protection will be provided, where requested. As for myself and other top government officials, peak security will be in force for forty-eight hours preceding and succeeding the date and time threatened in Wolf's letter."

"If you attach no importance to these nuts," the *Inquirer* sniped, "why spend public funds to—"

"We *must* proceed with caution whenever the Leader of the Nation is threatened! Meanwhile, we are doing our best to apprehend these maniacs. Especially the ringleader, Immanuel Wolf!"

The woman from the weekly newspaper shyly raised her hand. "I hope," she said apologetically, "that you won't be offended, but—well, Mr. President, aren't you the least bit *scared*?"

"Of *what*?" the President laughed. "Our security is tight. Not even a flea could approach undetected."

"Will you acquiesce to any of their demands?"

The President shook his head. "We are all aware of the problems of the aged, and medical research is important to us," he said grimly, "but murdering innocent people to achieve legislation and budgetary allocations will never be accepted as a mode of bargaining! Such vicious measures will gain nothing, nor will we fear retribution! We are impregnable!"

The list, copied in flowing golden letters, covered two large white sheets of poster-board that hung on the wall where the moonlight fell.

Wolf sat cross-legged, dressed in black. At the door, Thomasina summoned each officer, one by one. Wolf neither moved nor spoke as each in turn entered, bowed, and reported. But when each was done, he soberly inclined his head in dismissal.

Only when the Levantine entered, at the last, did Wolf betray a moment of anxious emotion. But his ancient advisor shook his head.

"*Do not fear,*" he piped in his thin voice, "*The Resurrection of the Flesh is not yet at hand.*"

He departed. Thomasina lingered for a while, then left the vault.

Outside, Bell and Marianus sat on the ground, eyes closed, legs crossed, lips moving soundlessly. The others were close at hand sharing in the same transcendental experience.

Thomasina had sworn to herself that she would not participate, but as she watched the two old men, she was suddenly consumed with jealousy. How *dare* they share so intimately in the Leader? Only *she* had the right! In the past, to whom had Wolf turned for physical and spiritual sustenance? *To her!* The first time was a mere union of flesh, but later there was the perverse ecstasy of the bloodbath, a union of bestiality—and still later, the burning-out of sin and the intimate baptism into godhead, a union of spirit and shame . . .

She sat upon the ground and closed her eyes. Her brain was filled with a cacophony of thoughts, but at last she narrowed consciousness to a bright, thin filament and cast out the thread for the Leader to gather on the loom of his Purpose.

In the silence of the tomb, he patiently collected the questing strands of will. One by one, he counted them until the tally agreed with the total reported by his deputies. He knew each by its individual and special tang of rancor. Here was the nameless bookworm who suffered ridicule in his youth for not being able to catch a ball; his hatred beat strongest against the sportsmen on the list. And here was a breastless hag whose life had slipped by without love, marriage, or children; her

venomous fury centered solely on the pneumatic sex-pots, models, and actresses.

When Wolf had a secure fix on every frequency, he added the potency of his own Wrath to the massed anguish and accumulated rage of hundreds of oppressed and dying souls.

His eyes opened and focused on the list. The first name was that of the President.

Wolf concentrated.

For I am a Burning-Glass!

By the time he reached the final name, there was a dull ache in his chest and the blood throbbed in his temples. His heart beat sluggishly and he had trouble with his breathing.

Disconnecting himself at last from the telepathic network, he lay upon the floor and entered a deep sleep.

He did not even wake when Thomasina, Blasko, and Marianus entered in high spirits, bearing newspapers whose banner headlines proclaimed the sudden and mysterious deaths of the President and seventy-four other prominent citizens . . .

IV

On the blind side of the sepulchre where Immanual Wolf maintained his headquarters, a cul-de-sac was formed by the massive slabs of the tomb-wall itself and a high concrete barrier which separated the cemetery from a neighboring patch of barren land.

One evening, Wolf emerged from the tomb, eyes bright with fever, leaning on Thomasina's arm. Beckoning to his lieutenants, he led the way round the side

of the vault and stopped a few feet from the angle made by the wall and the exterior rampart.

On the ground near the place where he stood was a large wooden crate. Someone had painted ragged letters on the slats in red: "*For the Resurrection of the Flesh.*"

He regarded his people intently, his firm gaze flickering from one face to another. As he spoke, his voice was low, subdued.

"The time has come," he said. "Are you ready? We achieved fame by executing our immediate enemies, those who would have let us rot in agony and loneliness. But we have proven ourselves too strong. For we are the Keepers of the Flame!"

"We are the Keepers of the Flame!" everyone repeated.

"We distinguished ourselves," Wolf continued, "by expunging from society's register seventy-five hangers-on, degenerates and corrupters of the public good. Politicians who would not act on our behalf. They refused, and I condemned them. Entertainers who perverted the urgency of our Cause by tempting the young to dally and dream, instead of seeking cures for the cancers of old age and dying. Models and sports figures who did the same with slightly different lures. They cheated us of time, and earned the death that I dispatched—for those who pander to illusion shall perish!

"And now we are renowned—but *still* our message is untold! This then is my charge: go forth and bring the aged and the sickly to me, the lost and the bitter, for our greatest work is at hand. We must form an army to attack a *fortress*!"

His hand curved outward, indicating the wooden crate upon the ground. Once more he lowered his voice. "My friends, if we should fail, there must be nothing left for our enemies to torture and degrade. In

this box are implements for the Last Day. But go forth now and mass our army, and be of good cheer, for the Flame is bright, and we shall seize the fortress and lay siege to the conscience of the nation!"

Raising both arms, he shouted, "Long live Life!"

His lieutenants repeated the movement. "Long live the Leader! Long live Wolf!"

But that night, he had another nightmare.

He had fallen asleep with his head in Thomasina's lap, and as he slumbered, she crooned a lullaby. She began to nod off herself when suddenly Wolf sprang to his feet, shrieking in terror. He retreated to a corner of the crypt and tried to curl up into as small a ball as possible.

"Look!" he moaned in terror. "He is coming! There! There! *There!*"

"Why, who?" she asked. "Who do you see?"

"He!" he gibbered in fright.

"*Who?*"

"He! He! *He!*" Wolf pointed to the door of the vault. "Over there! *He! HE! HE!*" The reiterated ejaculation became a painful, hacking cough. Wolf clutched his throat, pulling at his collar to tear off the restricting cloth and gasp in lungfuls of air.

Thomasina strode over to him, put her hands upon his shoulders and shook him briskly. At last, he calmed down. Looking up, he recognized her and smiled bleakly.

"The moment is almost at hand, *liebchen*."

"What moment?" Her patience was wearing thin. "What are you talking about, Wolf?"

He shook his head ruefully. "The moment I've always dreaded, yet longed for. That mysterious moment when the mind topples and rejoins inanimate matter—meaningless dust. For soon I shall leave my skin—"

"Stop it, Wolf!" she warned. He paid no attention.

"Yes," he nodded morosely, "soon I shall shed this wrinkled, dried-up skin, this old, unappealing skin in which once I was young. A million murderous microbes infest me—"

"You will stop!"

"At night, they nibble; by day, they chew. Consuming me, bite by bite, bit by bit—"

His head snapped back and cracked against the wall as she smacked his face with the flat of her palm. He looked at her, amazed.

"You will be our Leader!" she commanded, towering over him. Her face was a mask of stern purpose, untouched by pity. "Your army is massing, and you must be prepared to greet them."

Wolf shook his head. "I am dying. I will lead them from beyond the grave."

She grasped a handful of his hair and wrenched his head from side to side. *"You—will—lead—them!"*

Wincing in pain, he whined, "I am *unworthy*. Sanctify me! Make me fit to lead once more! Expel the dross from my spirit and baptise me in flame!"

Her lips curled in disgust, but she released him and he flopped on the floor, rolled on his back, and waited for her to humiliate him.

She performed her task with seeming revulsion, but secretly she cherished her role as savior of her Leader. Without her, Wolf would falter, and the Cause might fail.

She could not bear for that to happen . . .

In the icy hours before dawn, they began to arrive. They were feeble and infirm. Raw wind sliced the warmth from their dry cheeks and penetrated deep into the marrow of their brittle bones.

Wolf's lieutenants greeted them as they came, wel-

coming with a word, gesturing each to a place in the ranks. Nearly a hundred showed up, hobbling, creeping, stumping across the waste, some with canes, some with crutches. One especially determined old man managed the arduous journey with an aluminum walker.

At a signal from Thomasina, Marianus beat upon an improvised drum made from ragged canvas stretched over an emptied coffin. Wolf's officers marched briskly into place.

Marianus quickened the rhythm. The army felt sluggish blood stir inside desiccated veins. Breath quickened; choppy palms beat together in excitement. Toothless mouths began to chant Wolf's name. All joined in, until it seemed as if one dry, piping voice belabored the December winds. Then, as if all were of one mind, they stopped.

The Leader came forth and confronted his troops.

He began his exhortation shyly, tentatively. Some of the assemblage felt a trifle disappointed, but Wolf was only getting the feel of his audience. As he spoke, he gained momentum. Soon his flaming eyes saw into every soul gathered before him. His tongue licked the brains of his listeners, teasing, cajoling, pleading, persuading.

Suddenly, he was no longer a salesman, their equal. He was far above them, and his words lashed their pride, exhorting them to fight. He shamed them for retreating into the safety nets of age, senility, and the grave. He whipped them with the truncheon of his wit, excoriating those whose doubts he sensed, threatening and damning with wild gesticulations. He shook fists at them, raining curses on their care-lined faces.

And then, just as abruptly, he was no longer their judge, but their redeemer. His voice caressed and comforted. The fire in his eyes dimmed and pity appeared.

He rehearsed their long sorrows and pains, soothed their anguish, and invited them to rest within the peace of his bosom.

"For all shall be peace," he breathed, and some wept. "All shall be peace, and we shall *all* rest. For I am the Leader. The will of the world is peace, for the will of the world is my will. There are not two wills, but one—*Mine!*" He raised his hands in benediction. "Long live Life!"

All, with one accord, kneeled and bowed their heads before him, whispering, "*Long live Wolf!*"

Stepping briskly into the tent, Wolf greeted his deputies with a curt nod and waited for Thomasina to join him. He carried a riding-crop in his hand and swatted it against his leg. When she was by his side, he gestured at a map of the city spread out upon the floor.

"Look at the circled area," he said, biting off each word crisply. "*That* is where we must attack!"

Marianus, the giant, peered at it carefully, squinting his eyes to read the fine print. "But," he observed, "it is only a broadcasting studio."

"*Only* a broadcasting studio?! *Idiot!!* Do you have any idea *what it means* to us?? That building is *the* largest television studio in the country! It transmits programs to every community of the Nation! That one facility is the answer to our problem, for with it, we can reach millions tonight! *Millions!* They will hear our Message and tremble!"

The announcement was greeted with considerable discussion, but at last Wolf's officers concurred in asking him how he planned to wrench away prime-time from a commercial network.

He stared at them with amazement and scorn. "By force! *You* have an army! Use it! Do you expect *me* to

plan every last detail, idiots? I have a Sermon to prepare! *Get out!*"

They hastened to do so. Outside, they stood in a circle and argued, while the army sat nearby, wondering what the trouble was. After fifteen minutes of purposeless wrangling, Ewan Bell put a long, brown finger to his lips and stepped back to permit Thomasina Ellice to pass by and command the middle of the circle.

"All right!" she barked in a high, strident voice. "You will obey my instructions! Marianus, form the troops into task forces of twenty. Blasko, help him! Bell—"

In half-an-hour, Thomasina's army was ready.

They sidled, crept, hobbled, each going by a different route at various times. Only the Levantine remained behind to wait for Wolf's return. The troops were told to form squads of five, and if necessary to split into even smaller groups to avoid suspicion. They were to reconvene only after they were inside the television studio. The commanders of Wolf's army coordinated their watches, and the maneuver began.

When they had all departed, Thomasina reentered the tomb and told Wolf everything was ready. He nodded, pulled an old cloak about his shoulders, tucked the riding-crop into the crook of his arm and strode forth. Thomasina fell in step behind him.

Saying nothing, they stepped purposefully through the graveyard. When they reached the front gate, which was still open, they marched through without breaking stride. The caretaker stared at them in perplexity and awe.

On the subway, Wolf refused to sit. He stood by one of the central poles, arm bent around it, feet planted wide, daring the vehicle to toss him about. A young

man got on, guffawed loudly, and began making remarks about Hallowe'en staying late. But Wolf fixed him with his stare, and the boy began to tremble. Shrinking from the old man, he pressed against the door and never took his eyes off Wolf. At the next stop, he dashed through the gaping doorway, shouting, *"It's him! It's him!"*

Their stop was next. Heads turned to follow them as they marched along the platform and up the exit stairs to the street.

They paused long enough to check their watches, agreed it was time, crossed the street, and entered the lobby of the largest building in the area.

The guard at the reception booth made no move to stop them. As they passed, he stuck up his arms in salute.

"Long live Wolf!"

"Long live Life!" Wolf returned, snapping his heels.

Marianus was waiting by the elevator. Saluting his Leader, he pressed a button and rode them to the main broadcasting studio.

The place was filled with Wolf's legions, and everywhere there was evidence of carnage. Wolf paid no attention. He walked briskly on, looking neither right nor left, until at last Blasko greeted him and threw open the door of Sound Studio A and pointed inside.

"The cameras are ready. Long live Wolf!"

The Leader inclined his head and walked up to the camera with a glowing red light on its side. As he did, images of himself swam into view on countless monitors.

Behind him, Thomasina circled the room and entered the control booth. Stepping over the hacked bodies of several engineers, she surveyed the bank of video screens, identified the correct punch-up button

and pressed it, sending Immanuel Wolf's face and voice across thousands of miles and into millions of homes.

"We are *all* guilty, my friends!" said the Leader. "The young, the crabbed old ones who cannot change, the prostitutes and clergymen who sell Salvation, short-term and long-term . . .

"And *you*, what is *your* guilt?!" The deep, burning eyes pierced the camera lens, radiated across the land and stunned a quarter of a billion people with their hypnotic force.

"You *have* no virtue!" he accused the Nation. "You do not love your neighbors! You do not care if the air and water are poisoned, for you are pigs! Animals who fornicate and fight and croak! Yet you babble of a righteous God whose 'love' will save you. *You*—the gnats on the skin of an infected world! *You* pretend to comprehend the cosmos! The world cries for questions and you rape it with answers! I tell you it is not as important to go to the moon as it is to go inside our brains! The maggots that destroy us are also mortal. We have the means to eviscerate them from our innards. *Life*, my friends, not *Death*! I preach youth and joy, and say it is obscene to grow old and weak and sick. It is vile to molder in a pit. Yet the fools who order our existence divert our attention with fairy-tales of gingerbread heavens where gods will sugarsuck the cocks of our immortal souls!"

As he rapped out each word, he beat his fist against the top of a nearby lectern. It took his face partly out of camera-range, but he was too excited to notice. Nor did he see Thomasina Ellice on the other side of the control-room window wildly waving her arms to catch his attention.

But suddenly Wolf instinctively knew what was tak-

ing place just outside of Sound Studio A—and with the knowledge came a profound change in his manner. Facing the camera once more, he addressed the Nation with all the brooding malevolence of his twisted spirit.

"I say our hope is now, fools! The Resurrection of the Flesh is at hand!"

In the corridor, hundreds of policemen swarmed among the ranks of the aged, swinging billyclubs, brandishing pistols. Wolf's army had few weapons of defense save canes, crutches, and teeth, but his officers wielded the scalpels they'd borne away from the rest homes and used them well.

"The Leader speaks! He must not be stopped!"

Arms cracked, clubs bashed down on skulls, crutches were forcibly wrenched away from invalids as the policemen pressed inexorably onward, stepping upon screaming cripples, snapping match-thin wrists with great blows of their nightsticks.

Wolf's voice thundered over the loudspeakers.

"THIS IS THE END! THE VERY HAIRS ON YOUR HEADS—THEY ARE ALL NUMBERED!"

Ewan Bell sprang out with a yell and ripped his scalpel across three policemen's necks before bullets shattered his limbs, head, privates, and chest. As he fell, an angry rookie fired shot after shot into the dying man's face.

Blasko was crushed to death when his squads broke and ran. They trampled on his head, cursing him for involving them in massacre. Marianus saw it happen. He roared, "Treason!" and his troops turned and shook their canes at the runaways. The two masses clashed and a confusion of screams and breaking bones filled the air. But the voice of Immanuel Wolf bellowed above every other noise.

"THE ONLY WAY TO OVERCOME DEATH IS TO DIE! ONLY WHERE THERE ARE GRAVES ARE THERE RESURRECTIONS!"

Thomasina Ellice rushed out of the control-room and grabbed Wolf by the arm, meaning to pull him towards a small exitway at the rear of the studio. He whipped her savagely across the room. She landed against a piano and slumped to the floor, but immediately picked herself up. By then, Wolf was already addressing the camera again.

With both arms upraised in his army's gesture of salute, Wolf's voice rang above the moans of the injured and the dying.

"LONG LIVE DEATH!" he cried.

"Traitor!" Thomasina snapped. "Come, or we will be killed!"

Bewilderment filled his eyes. "*Liebchen*," he greeted her with delight, "when do I go on the air?"

"Come, Immanuel!" she ordered, shaking him hard enough to rattle his teeth. "*I am Leader now! Follow me!*"

She found a maintenance man's uniform hanging in a utility closet in the back corridor, and made him put it on in the dark while they crept down a windy unlighted fire exit. The air was filled with screams and gunshots, but though they stumbled several times, somehow they escaped undetected, faces and hands streaked with grime and sweat.

She regarded him with scorn as he sat down in the subway, exhausted. He clutched his heart and sucked in shallow breaths, eyes closed tight. Before the last stop, his head was lolling against her shoulder. She impatiently shoved it away.

He could barely drag himself, one painful step at a

time, down the long road leading to the cemetery. He tried to put his arm around her for support, but she shook him off and walked several paces in front of him. Shivering in the freezing night-wind, he stumbled, repeatedly, but Thomasina paid no attention.

They had to go the long way around, following the perimeter of the wall. At last, they reached the pile of offal his lieutenants had raked up the day before so his army could climb over the barrier. Wolf's feet sank into a rotting mixture of animal and vegetable compost, but he hardly noticed, for he was half-asleep.

At the door of the vault, he sank to the ground, unable to move another step. She stood next to him, refusing to speak.

They remained in the same position for a long time. At last Wolf looked up and asked where the Levantine was.

"Gone," she said abruptly.

"Gone?"

"*For good.*"

Just before dawn, the end came. Thomasina heard footsteps crunching softly in the thin crust of fallen snow. Straining to hear, she suddenly realized, with wildly beating heart, that the sounds were drawing steadily nearer.

"Wolf," she whispered, "We must go inside. Someone is coming—we must hide."

Her words were a goad to his pride. Intelligence flickering once more in his face, Wolf clutched the broken concrete of the crypt and pulled himself up.

"I am *still* Leader," he declared in a soft, but incisive voice, "And my army has not deserted me!" He peered into the dusk and demanded to know who was approaching. The footsteps stopped. A tall figure loomed up in the twilight, one hand raised in greeting.

"Long live Wolf!" gasped Marianus. The giant stumbled forward and fell at his Leader's feet. A stream of blood ran down his face from a gash in his temple. His right arm dangled uselessly by his side. His strength was almost gone. Thomasina stepped forward to give him First Aid, but Wolf shoved her aside.

"*Where is my army?*" he demanded.

"They are dead," Marianus replied feebly. "Captured or dead."

"All of them?" Wolf's voice shook with rage. "*That's impossible.*"

"But, my Leader, it is true! They are all gone!"

"My lieutenants?" Wolf asked coldly. "Where are your fellow officers?"

"Dead. All dead." Marianus was so weak he could hardly speak.

The old man eyed him shrewdly, then put his hand tenderly upon the giant's shoulder and looked intently into his eyes.

"Well, well, what does it matter?" he asked in a kindly voice. "I still have *you*, Marianus! *You* have escaped! You shall be the cornerstone, the glorious remnant, and *you* will create my armies anew! I see *you* at their head, general of my legions! On the day of victory, it shall be Marianus—Marianus and Wolf, marching forth together in the name of the Flame!"

"Yes, my Leader!" Marianus cried out, stumbling to his feet.

"Our Cause shall rise once more!" thundered Wolf. "You shall be its champion! I will clothe you in the raiment of a Commander, and you shall enlist officers, lieutenants, and sub-lieutenants and they will seek out soldiers—and Marianus shall lead them all!"

"Yes, my Leader!" the wounded man shouted, tottering forward to grasp Wolf's hand and kiss it. In-

stead, he pitched forward on his face and moved no more.

"What's wrong with him?" Wolf asked impatiently.

"He's dead," said Thomasina, kneeling by the giant's body.

"*TRAITOR!*" Wolf screamed. "*Vermin!* Are they *all* against me at the last?! Must the Leader stand alone?" He yanked Marianus up by the chin and dashed the unfeeling head against a corner of the vault, shouting obscenities. At first Thomasina tried to stop him, but Wolf flung her off furiously.

"Bitch! Do you, too, oppose the will of your Leader?"

Shaking her head, she did not interfere again, even when fragments of bone and brain began to stick out of the battered skull. Marianus was already dead, so why should she care?

Besides, she was glad to have her Leader back . . .

Suddenly, a fit of trembling seized Wolf. Dropping the head, he straightened with a gasp of pain. Rage and fear contorted his face.

"*No!*" he howled. "I won't permit it!" Leaning against the stone wall, Wolf clutched his heart, breathing stertorously as the blood rushed to his cheeks, turning his face purple. Sweat beaded his forehead, ran down the cracks and furrows of his neck. "He, too, challenges me!" he rasped through tight-clenched teeth.

"*Who* does?" Thomasina asked.

"Don't you see, moron bitch? There! *There!* He. *He.* HE! *HE!*" A violent spasm of coughing doubled Wolf over. When it passed, he struggled to rise but could not. Fists clenched, eyes blazing with hatred, he ranted hoarsely, "I *defy* him! *I* am the Leader! The will of the universe is *my* will!" He tried to raise his hands in the sign of the Flame, but there was no strength left in his arms.

"Long live Life," Wolf whispered.

The wind whistled in the bone-cold night and carried his words away. For a little while, the echo of his voice lived among the headstones and markers, but at last the sound reverberations began to deteriorate and mix with the dust that clogged the winter air.

"Long live Wolf," Thomasina replied softly.

Though she could detect neither heartbeat nor pulse, she rummaged in her bag, found a pocket-mirror and held it under Wolf's nostrils. No vapor appeared on the surface.

Wasting no time in grief, Thomasina set briskly about preparing for the Resurrection of the Flesh. Grasping Marianus by the ankles, she hauled the huge corpse inside with difficulty and rolled it off to one side. Wolf she carried tenderly in her arms, putting him down on the spot where they had often slept together. She took off his clothes, then did the same with her own garments, leaving only her shoes as a last concession to the frailty of the human body.

Stepping outside, she rounded the vault, knelt by the wooden crate and prized up the slats. Removing the contents, she carried her burden inside and set it on the floor above Wolf's head, then kicked off her shoes and lay down next to him. It only took a few seconds to attach the proper wires and activate the mechanism. Since it was a clock device, she had leisure to meditate before she and Wolf were united, utterly and eternally.

Closing her eyes, Thomasina cast her thoughts into the starless Void, searching for a filament of awareness that she would recognize as Immanuel Wolf . . .

Colossal forces ripped out the sides of the vault. Great slabs of stone, blood, ash, and lewdly intermingled limbs and torsos of old and new cadavers

rained everywhere. But falling snow blanketed the gruesome rubble in a thick white patina of Frost.

The following morning, the police investigated the wreckage, but were at a loss to explain what it meant.

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